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MASTERS of the BENCH

Of the TWO HONOURABLE

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THESE 111130

DISCOURSES

ARE INSCRIBED,

By their moſt obedient,

humble Servant,

THO. LONDON.

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DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE I.

PART I.

JOHN vi. 67, 68, 69.

Then ſaid Jeſus unto the Twelve, Will ye alſo go away? Then Simon Peter anſwered him, Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life. And we believe, and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.

IN the foregoing Part of this Chapter we read, that the Doctrine of our Saviour had given ſuch Offence to his Hearers, that many even of his Diſciples went back, and walked no more with him: Upon which Occaſion our Saviour put this Queſtion to the

Twelve, *Will ye alſo go away?* To which St. *Peter*, in the Name of all, made anſwer, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life. And we believe, and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.* In this Anſwer there are three Things expreſſed, or implied, as the Ground of their Conſtancy and Adherence to Chriſt:

I. The firſt is, The miſerable Condition they ſhould be in, if they did forſake him, having no other in whom they could truſt: *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?*

II. The ſecond is, The Excellency of his Religion, and the certain Means it afforded of obtaining that which is the great End of Religion, a bleſſed Life after this: *Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life.*

III. The third is, The Authority and divine Commiſſion of Chriſt, upon which their Faith and Confidence were built: *We believe, and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.* To believe, becauſe we have ſufficient Reaſon to determine our Belief, is a rational Faith; and this is what is meant in the Word ἐγνώκαμεν: *We believe*, becauſe we have, from the Things we have heard and ſeen of you, determined with ourſelves, *That thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

Theſe

Theſe three Reaſons, which St. *Peter* gives for Adherence to Chriſt, refer to as many general Principles or Maxims:

As firſt, That Religion, the only Means by which Men can arrive at true Happineſs, by which they can attain to the laſt Perfection and Dignity of their Nature, does not, in the preſent Circumſtances of the World, depend on human Reaſoning or Inventions: For, was this the Caſe, we need not to go from home for Religion, or to ſeek farther than our own Breaſt for the Means of reconciling ourſelves to God, and obtaining his Favour, and, in conſequence of it, Life eternal. Upon ſuch Suppoſition, St. *Peter* argued very weakly, in ſaying, *To whom ſhall we go?* For to whom need they go to learn that which they were well able to teach themſelves?

The ſecond Principle refered to is, That the great End of Religion is future Happineſs; and conſequently the beſt Religion is that which will moſt ſurely direct us to eternal Life. Upon this Ground St. *Peter* prefers the Goſpel of Chriſt: *Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life.*

The third Thing is, That the Authority and Word of God is the only ſure Foundation of Religion, and the only reaſonable Ground for us to build our Hopes on. Thus

St. *Peter* accounts for his Confidence in the Religion which Chriſt taught: *We know, and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

In this State of the Caſe the Neceſſity of Religion in general is ſuppoſed; and the only Queſtion is, from what Fountain we muſt derive it. The Diſpute can only lie between Natural and Revealed Religion: If Nature be able to direct us, it will be hard to juſtify the Wiſdom of God in giving us a Revelation, ſince the Revelation can only ſerve the ſame Purpoſe, which Nature alone could well ſupply.

Since the Light of the Goſpel has ſhone throughout the World, Nature has been much improving; we ſee many Things clearly, many Things which Reaſon readily embraces, which nevertheleſs the World before was generally a Stranger to. The Goſpel has given us true Notions of God and of ourſelves, right Conceptions of his Holineſs and Purity, and of the Nature of divine Worſhip: It has taught us a Religion, in the Practice of which our preſent Eaſe and Comfort, and our Hopes of future Happineſs and Glory, conſiſt; it has rooted out Idolatry and Superſtition; and by inſtructing us in the Nature of God, and diſcovering to us his Unity,

Unity, his Omnipreſence, and infinite Knowledge, it has furniſhed us even with Principles of Reaſon, by which we reject and condemn the Rites and Ceremonies of Heatheniſm and Idolatry, and diſcover wherein the Beauty and Holineſs of divine Worſhip conſiſt: For the Nature of divine Worſhip muſt be deduced from the Nature of God; and 'tis impoſſible for Men to pay a reaſonable Service to God, till they have juſt and reaſonable Notions of him. But now, it ſeems, this is all become pure natural Religion; and 'tis to our own Reaſon and Underſtanding that we are indebted for the Notion of God and of divine Worſhip: And whatever elſe in Religion is agreeable to our Reaſon, is reckoned to proceed entirely from it: And, had the Unbelievers of this Age heard St. *Peter*'s piteous Complaint, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?* they would have bid him go to himſelf, and conſult his own Reaſon, and there he ſhould find all that was worth finding in Religion.

But let us, if you pleaſe, examine this Pretence, and ſee upon what Ground this Plea of natural Religion can be maintained. If Nature can inſtruct us ſufficiently in Religion, we have indeed no Reaſon to go any-where elſe; ſo far we are agreed: But

whether Nature can or no, is, in Truth, rather a Queſtion of Fact, than mere Speculation; for the Way to know what Nature can do, is to take Nature by itſelf, and try its Strength alone. There was a Time when Men had little elſe but Nature to go to; and that is the proper Time to look into, to ſee what mere and unaſſiſted Nature can do in Religion. Nay, there are ſtill Nations under the Sun, who are, as to Religion, in a mere State of Nature: The glad Tidings of the Goſpel have not reached them, nor have they been bleſſed, or (to ſpeak in the modern Phraſe) *prejudiced* with divine Revelations, which we, leſs worthy of them than they, ſo much complain of: In other Matters they are polite and civilized; they are cunning Traders, fine Artificers, and in many Arts and Sciences not unſkilful. Here then we may hope to ſee natural Religion in its full Perfection; for there is no Want of natural Reaſon, nor any Room to complain of Prejudices or Prepoſſeſſion: But yet, alas! theſe Nations are held in the Chains of Darkneſs, and given up to the blindeſt Superſtition and Idolatry. Men wanted not Reaſon before the Coming of Chriſt, nor Opportunity nor Inclination to improve it: Arts and Sciences had long before obtained their juſt Perfection; the

the Number of the Stars had been counted, and their Motions obſerved and adjuſted; the Philoſophy, Oratory, and Poetry of thoſe Ages are ſtill the Delight and Entertainment of this: Religion was not the leaſt Part of their Inquiry; they ſearched all the Receſſes of Reaſon and Nature; and, had it been in the Power of Reaſon and Nature to furniſh Men with juſt Notions and Principles of Religion, here we ſhould have found them: But, inſtead of them, we find nothing but the groſſeſt Superſtition and Idolatry; the Creatures of the Earth advanced into Deities, and Men degenerating and making themſelves lower than the Beaſts of the Field. Time would fail me to tell of the Corruptions and Extravagancies of the politeſt Nations. Their Religion was their Reproach, and the Service they paid their Gods was a Diſhonour to them and to themſelves: The moſt ſacred Part of their Devotion was the moſt impure; and the only Thing that was commendable in it, is, that it was kept as a great Myſtery and Secret, and hid under the Darkneſs of the Night; and, was Reaſon now to judge, it would approve of nothing in this Religion, but the Modeſty of withdrawing itſelf from the Eyes of the World.

This being the Caſe wherever Men have been left to mere Reaſon and Nature to direct them; what Security have the great Patrons of natural Religion now, that, were they left only to Reaſon and Nature, they ſhould not run into the ſame Errors and Abſurdities? Have they more Reaſon than thoſe who have gone before them? In all other Inſtances Nature is the ſame now that ever it was, and we are but acting over again the ſame Part that our Anceſtors acted before us: Wiſdom and Prudence and Cunning are now what they formerly were; nor can this Age ſhew human Nature in any one Character exalted beyond the Examples which Antiquity has left us. Can we ſhew greater Inſtances of civil and political Wiſdom, than are to be found in the Governments of *Greece* and *Rome?* Are not the civil Laws of *Rome* ſtill had in Admiration? and have they not a Place allowed them ſtill in almoſt all Kingdoms? Since then in nothing elſe we are grown wiſer than the Heathen World, what Probability is there, that we ſhould have grown wiſer in Religion, if we had been left, as they were, to mere Reaſon and Nature? To this Day there is no Alteration for the better, except only in the Countries where the Goſpel has been preached. What

ſhall

ſhall we ſay of the *Chineſe*, a Nation that wants not either Reaſon or Learning, and in ſome Parts of it pretends to excel the World? They have been daily improving in the Arts of Life, and in every Kind of Knowledge and Science; but yet in Religion they are ignorant and ſuperſtitious, and have but very little of what we call natural Religion among them: And what Ground is there to imagine that Reaſon would have done more, made greater Diſcoveries of Truth, or more entirely ſubdued the Paſſions of Men, in *England* or *France*, or any other Country of *Europe*, than it has in the Eaſtern or Southern Parts of the World? Are not Men as reaſonable Creatures in the Eaſt, as they are in the Weſt? and have not they the ſame Means of exerciſing and improving their Reaſon too? Why then ſhould you think that Reaſon would do that now in this Place, which it has never yet been able to do in any Time or Place whatever?

This Fact is ſo very plain and undeniable, that I cannot but think, that, would Men conſider it fairly, they would ſoon be convinced how much they are indebted to the Revelation of the Goſpel, even for that natural Religion which they ſo fondly boaſt of: For how comes it to paſs, that there is ſo much

much Reaſon, ſuch clear natural Religion, in every Country where the Goſpel is profeſſed, and ſo little of both every-where elſe?

But is there then, you'll ſay, no ſuch Thing as natural Religion? Does not St. *Paul* lay the Heathen World under Condemnation for not attending to the Dictates of it? *Becauſe*, ſays he, *that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them; for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead; ſo that they are without Excuſe: Becauſe that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their fooliſh Heart was darkened. Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became Fools; and changed the Glory of the uncorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beaſts, and creeping Things.* — A ſad Account this of the State of Religion in the Heathen World, and a manifeſt Proof how much Nature ſtands in need of Aſſiſtance! What we learn from St. *Paul* is plainly this; That, notwithſtanding the Care which God had taken to diſplay the Evidences of his own Being and Godhead in every Work of the Creation,

Creation, ſo that Men could not but have a Notion of the Deity; yet, ſo little did they profit by that Knowledge, that it ſerved only to render them inexcuſable in their Superſtition and Idolatry: For, when they *knew God*, (as indeed all the Heathen World had a Notion of a ſupreme Being) yet they *glorified him not as God; but changed the Glory of the uncorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beaſts, and creeping Things.* And was not Nature an excellent Guide to follow, that thus ſtumbled at the very Threſhold, and having from natural Reaſon the Notion of a ſupreme Deity, ſought to find him among the four-footed Beaſts and creeping Things of the Earth? Can you ſay who it was that thus debaſed the Reaſon and Underſtanding of Mankind? What Evil was it that had diffuſed itſelf through the whole Race, and ſo poſſeſſed their Senſes, that *ſeeing they did not perceive, and hearing they did not underſtand?* Or, do you think that you alone are exempt from this common, this univerſal Blindneſs, and that the ſame Reaſon and Nature, that hitherto have miſguided all the World into Error and Idolatry, would lead you, out of the common Road, into Truth and pure Religion?

Is

Is it not the utmoſt Preſumption to think thus, and to imagine that we alone are able to ſurmount the Difficulties which all the World before us has ſunk under? And yet thus every Man muſt think, who ſets up natural Religion in Oppoſition to Revelation: For has mere Nature ever yet, in any one Part of the World, extricated itſelf from Error? Do the Nations of old, or thoſe which now are, afford any Inſtance of this Kind? But ſtill you think that Nature is ſufficient to direct you; and what elſe is this but to diſtinguiſh yourſelf from all the World, as if you only were privileged againſt the common Failings and Corruptions of Mankind?

But you'll ſay, Are there not complete Schemes of natural Religion drawn from Principles and Axioms of Reaſon, without calling in the Help of Revelation? and are they not evident Demonſtrations that Nature is able to furniſh us with a Religion that is pure and holy and agreeable to the divine Attributes? Allow this; but let us then be informed how it came to paſs, that never any Syſtem of this pure Religion was in Uſe and Practice in any Nation, or indeed ever fully diſcovered, till the Goſpel had enlightened the World. You may boaſt of

Socrates

Socrates and *Plato*, and ſome few others in the Heathen World, and tell us perhaps of their great Attainments upon the Strength of mere Reaſon. Be it ſo: But what is this to the preſent Queſtion? Muſt Millions in every Age of the World be left in Ignorance, becauſe five or ſix among them may happen to extricate themſelves? Would it be reaſonable to ſuffer a whole Nation to periſh without Help in a Plague, becauſe ſome few were not tainted with the Diſtemper? Or, will you ſay all Men are ſeven Feet high, becauſe we ſee now-and-then ſome who are?

I queſtion not but the wiſe Creator of the World formed us for his own Service, and that he gave us whatever was requiſite either to the Knowledge or the Performance of our Duty: And that there are ſtill in Nature the Seeds and Principles of Religion, however buried under the Rubbiſh of Ignorance and Superſtition, I as little queſtion. But what was it, I beſeech you, that oppreſſed this Light of Reaſon and Nature for ſo many Ages? and what is it that has now ſet it free? Whatever the Diſtemper was, Nature plainly wanted Aſſiſtance, being unable to diſengage herſelf from the Bonds and Fetters in which ſhe was held: We may diſagree perhaps in finding a Name for this Evil,

this general Corruption of Nature; but the Thing itſelf is evident; the Impotence of Nature ſtands confeſſed; the Blindneſs, the Ignorance of the Heathen World are too plain a Proof of it. This general Corruption and Weakneſs of Nature made it neceſſary that Religion ſhould be reſtored by ſome other Means, and that Men ſhould have other Helps to reſort to, beſides their own Strength and Reaſon. And, if natural Religion is indeed arrived to that State of Perfection ſo much boaſted of, it gives a ſtrong Teſtimony to the Goſpel, and evidently proves it to be an adequate Remedy and Support againſt the Evil and Corruption of Nature. For, where the Goſpel prevails, Nature is reſtored; and Reaſon, delivered from Bondage by Grace, ſees and approves what is holy, juſt, and pure: For what elſe can it be aſcribed to, but the Power of the Goſpel, that, in every Nation that names the Name of Chriſt, even Reaſon and Nature ſee and condemn the Follies, which others ſtill, for Want of the ſame Help, are held in Subjection to?

Can this Truth be evaded or denied? And what a Return then do we make for the Bleſſing we have received? and how deſpightfully do we treat the Goſpel of

Chriſt, to which we owe that clear Light even of Reaſon and Nature which we now enjoy, when we endeavour to ſet up Reaſon and Nature in Oppoſition to it? Ought the withered Hand, which Chriſt has reſtored and made whole, to be lifted up againſt him? or ſhould the dumb Man's Tongue, juſt looſened from the Bonds of Silence, blaſpheme the Power that ſet it free? Yet thus fooliſhly do we ſin, when we make natural Religion the Engine to batter down the Goſpel; for the Goſpel only could, and only has reſtored the Religion of Nature: And therefore there is a kind of Parricide in the Attempt, and an Infidelity heightened by the aggravating Circumſtance of unnatural Baſeneſs and Diſingenuity.

Nor will the Succeſs of the Attempt be much greater than the Wiſdom and the Piety of it: For, when once Nature leaves her faithful Guide, the Goſpel of Chriſt, it will be as unable to ſupport itſelf againſt Error and Superſtition, as it was to deliver itſelf from them, and will by Degrees fall back into its original Blindneſs and Corruption. Had you a View of the Diſputes that ariſe even upon the Principles of natural Religion, it would ſhew you what the End will be; for the Wanderings of human

Reaſon

Reaſon are infinite. Under the Goſpel-Diſpenſation we have the immutable Word of God for the Support of our Faith and Hope. We know in whom we have believed; in Him, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived; and, poor as our Services are, we have His Word for it, that our Labour of Love ſhall not be forgotten. But to them who rely on Nature only, it is not evident, nor can it be, whether any future Reward ſhall attend their religious Service. Well therefore did St. *Peter* ſay to Chriſt, *Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life*; for no other Religion can give any Security of Life and Happineſs to its Votaries. Whither then ſhall we go from Chriſt, or to whom ſhall we ſeek for Succour, ſince he only has the Words of eternal Life?

DISCOURSE I.

PART II.

THE ſecond Thing to be conſidered is, That the Excellency of Religion conſiſts in affording certain Means of obtaining eternal Life.

Religion is founded in the Principles of Reaſon and Nature; and, without ſuppoſing this Foundation, it would be as rational an Act to preach to Horſes as to Men. A Man, who has the Uſe of Reaſon, cannot conſider his Condition and Circumſtances in this World, or reflect upon his Notions of Good and Evil, and the Senſe he feels in himſelf that he is an accountable Creature for the Good or Evil he does, without aſking himſelf, how he came into this World, and for

what Purpoſe, and to whom it is that he is, or poſſibly may be, accountable. When, by tracing his own Being to the Original, he finds that there is one ſupreme all-wiſe Cauſe of all Things; when by Experience he ſees, that this World neither is, nor can be, the Place for taking a juſt and adequate Account of the Actions of Men; the Preſumption that there is another State after this, in which Men ſhall live, grows ſtrong and almoſt irreſiſtible: When he conſiders farther the Fears and Hopes of Nature with reſpect to Futurity, the Fear of Death common to all, the Deſire of continuing in Being which never forſakes us; and reflects for what Uſe and Purpoſe theſe ſtrong Impreſſions were given us by the Author of Nature; he cannot help concluding that Man was made not merely to act a ſhort Part upon the Stage of this World, but that there is another and more laſting State, to which he bears Relation. And from hence it muſt neceſſarily follow, that his Religion muſt be formed on a View of ſecuring a future Happineſs.

Since then the End that Men propoſe to themſelves by Religion is ſuch, it will teach us wherein the true Excellency of Religion conſiſts. If eternal Life and future Happineſs are what we aim at, that will be the beſt Religion,

Religion, which will moſt certainly lead us to eternal Life and future Happineſs: And it will be to no Purpoſe to compare Religions together in any other Reſpects, which have no Relation to this End.

Let us then by this Rule examine the Pretenſions of Revelation, and, as we go along, compare it with the preſent State of natural Religion, that we may be able to judge, *To whom we ought to go.*

Eternal Life and Happineſs are out of our Power to give ourſelves, or to obtain by any Strength and Force, or any Policy or Wiſdom. Could our own Arm reſcue us from the Jaws of Death and the Powers of the Kingdom of Darkneſs; could we ſet open the Gates of Heaven for ourſelves, and enter in to take Poſſeſſion of Life and Glory; we ſhould want no Inſtructions or Aſſiſtances from Religion; ſince what St. *Peter* ſaid of Chriſt every Man might apply to himſelf, and ſay, *I have the Words, or Means of eternal Life.*

But, ſince we have not this Power of Life and Death; and ſince there is One who has, who governeth all Things in Heaven and in Earth, who is over all God bleſſed for evermore; it neceſſarily follows, that either we muſt have no Share or Lot in the Glories of Futurity, or elſe that we muſt obtain

them from God, and receive them as his Gift and Favour: And conſequently, if eternal Life be the End of Religion, and likewiſe the Gift of God, Religion can be nothing elſe but the Means proper to be made uſe of by us to obtain of God this moſt excellent and perfect Gift of eternal Life: For, if eternal Life be the End of Religion, Religion muſt be the Means of obtaining eternal Life; and, if eternal Life can only be had from the Gift of God, Religion muſt be the Means of obtaining this Gift from God.

And thus far all Religions, that ever have appeared in the World, have agreed: The Queſtion has never yet been made by any, whether God is to be applied to for eternal Happineſs, or no; but every Sect has placed its Excellency in this, that it teaches the propereſt and moſt effectual Way of making this Application. Even natural Religion pretends to no more than this; it claims not eternal Life as the Right of Nature, but the Right of Obedience, and of Obedience to God, the Lord of Nature: And the Diſpute between natural and revealed Religion is not, whether God is to be applied to for eternal Happineſs; but only, whether Nature or Revelation can beſt teach us how to make this Application.

Prayers,

Prayers, and Praiſes, and Repentance for Sins paſt, are Acts of Devotion, which Nature pretends to inſtruct and direct us in: But why does ſhe teach us to pray, to praiſe, or to repent, but that ſhe eſteems one to be the proper Method of expreſſing our Wants, the other of expreſſing our Gratitude, and the third of making Atonement for Iniquity and Offences againſt God? In all theſe Acts Reference is had to the overruling Power of the Almighty; and they amount to this Confeſſion, That the Upſhot of all Religion is to pleaſe God in order to make ourſelves happy.

This will ſhew us what muſt neceſſarily be underſtood by any Perſon's, or by any Religion's, *having the Words of eternal Life*: For, ſince eternal Life can only be had by pleaſing God, no Perſon, no Religion, can be ſaid to have the Words of eternal Life upon any other Account, than becauſe it teaches and enables us ſo far at leaſt to pleaſe God, as to obtain eternal Life from him.

If we conſider God as the Ruler of this World as well as of the next, Religion indeed will be as neceſſary a Means of obtaining the Bleſſings of this Life, as of that which is to come. But this will make no Alteration in the Nature of Religion: For,

if the Bleſſings of this Life are the Gift of God, they muſt be obtained by pleaſing God; and the ſame Services muſt intitle us to the Bleſſings of this Life and of the next, unleſs you can ſuppoſe that there are different Ways of pleaſing God; one Way to pleaſe him, in order to obtain the Bleſſings of this World; and another, in order to obtain the Bleſſings of Heaven.

From this Account of the Nature of Religion, That it is the Knowledge of pleaſing God, and ſerving him acceptably, (I ſpeak of Religion now conſidered only as a Rule) there are ſome Conſequences which naturally follow, that may be of great Service to us in directing us in our Choice of Religion.

Firſt then; Since 'tis the Perfection of Religion to inſtruct us how to pleaſe God; and ſince to pleaſe God, and to act according to the Will of God, are but one and the ſame Thing; it neceſſarily follows, that muſt be the moſt perfect Religion, which does moſt perfectly inſtruct us in the Knowledge of the Will of God. Allow then Nature to have all the Advantages that ever the greateſt Patrons of natural Religion laid claim to on her behalf; allow Reaſon to be as clear, as uncorrupted, as unprejudiced, as even our fondeſt Wiſhes would make it; yet ſtill it

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can never be ſuppoſed, that Nature and Reaſon, in all their Glory, can be able to to know the Will of God ſo well as he himſelf knows it: And therefore, ſhould God ever make a Declaration of his Will, that Declaration muſt, according to the Nature and Neceſſity of the Thing, be a more perfect Rule for Religion, than Reaſon and Nature can poſſibly furniſh us with. Had we the Wiſdom and Reaſon of Cherubims and Seraphims to direct us in the Worſhip and Service of our Maker, nevertheleſs it would be our higheſt Wiſdom, as it is theirs, to ſubmit to his Laws, that is, to the Declarations of his Will.

Secondly; From hence it appears, how extremely wrong it is to compare Natural Religion and Revelation together, in order to inquire which is preferable; for 'tis neither more nor leſs than inquiring, whether we know God's Will better than he himſelf knows it. Falſe Revelations are no Revelations; and therefore to prefer natural Religion before ſuch pretended Revelations, is only to reject a Forgery: But to ſuppoſe that there is, or may be, a true Revelation, and yet to ſay that natural Religion is a better Guide, is to ſay that we are wiſer than God, and know better how to pleaſe him

without his Directions than with them. Upon this State of the Caſe then, a Revelation muſt be entirely rejected as a Forgery, or entirely ſubmitted to; and the only Debate between natural Religion and Revelation muſt be, whether we really know a Revelation, or no; and not whether Revelation or Nature be, in the nature of Things, the beſt and ſureſt Foundation of Religion: Which Diſpute but ill becomes our Condition, and is a vain Attempt to exalt ourſelves and our own Reaſon *above every Thing that is called God.*

Since then Revelation, conſidered as ſuch, muſt needs be the ſureſt Guide in Religion, every reaſonable Man is bound to conſider the Pretenſions of Revelation, when offered to him; for no Man can juſtify himſelf in relying merely on natural Religion, till he has ſatisfied himſelf that no better Directions are to be had. For, ſince 'tis the Buſineſs of Religion to pleaſe God, is it not a very natural and a very reaſonable Inquiry to make, whether God has any-where declared what will pleaſe him? at leaſt, 'tis reaſonable when we are called to this Inquiry, by having a Revelation tendered to us, ſupported by ſuch Evidence, which, though it may be eaſily

eaſily rejected without Reaſon, yet to Reaſon will ever approve itſelf.

But the Inquiry into the Evidence for any particular Revelation is excluded by thoſe who argue againſt all Revelation *a priori*, as being inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom of God. What they ſay amounts to this; That God, having given us Reaſon, has bound us to obey the Dictates of Reaſon, and tied himſelf down to judge us by that Rule, and that only: To ſuppoſe otherwiſe, they imagine, would be to maintain that God gave us an imperfect Rule at firſt, and which wanted to be mended; a Thing, they imagine, inconſiſtent with his Wiſdom: And, the Rule of Reaſon being ſufficient, all Revelation, they judge, muſt be uſeleſs and impertinent, and conſequently can never derive itſelf from God. But, as it is too apparent to be denied, that Reaſon and natural Religion never did in any Age univerſally prevail; to help out the Argument, it is farther ſuppoſed, that whatever happens in the World is agreeable to the original Deſign of God; and conſequently, that thoſe who have leaſt of Reaſon and natural Religion, are in the State for which God deſigned them; and, if ſo, 'tis abſurd to ſuppoſe a Revelation ſhould be given

given, to take Men out of that State in which God originally deſigned to place them.

This is the Sum of the Argument againſt Revelation *a priori*: To conſider it particularly will take more Time than can be allowed: But in brief we may obſerve,

1. That to argue, from the Perfection of human Reaſon, that we are diſcharged from receiving any new Laws from God, is inconſiſtent with as clear a Principle of Reaſon as any whatever, and which neceſſarily ariſes from the Relation between God and Man; which is, That the Creature is bound to obey the Creator, in which Way ſoever his Will is made known to him: And this ſurely is true with reſpect to the higheſt Order of Beings, as well as to the loweſt; for this Plea, now made for human Reaſon, would be preſumptuous in the Mouth of an Angel, and inconſiſtent with the Subjection he owes to God.

2. As to the Perfection of human Reaſon, it cannot be, nor, I ſuppoſe, will it be maintained, that human Reaſon is abſolutely perfect; and therefore the Meaning muſt be, that Reaſon is relatively perfect, conſidered as the Rule of our Obedience. But this is true only upon Suppoſition that Reaſon is the only Rule of our Obedience; for, if there

there be any other Rule beſides, mere Reaſon cannot be the perfect Rule of our Obedience: And therefore this Argument is really begging the Thing in queſtion; for it ſuppoſes there is no other Rule but Reaſon, which is the Thing not to be ſuppoſed, but to be proved. As much may be ſaid for every Law, as is ſaid in this Caſe for human Reaſon: Every Law, being the only Law in the Caſe, is a perfect Rule for the Subject's Obedience, becauſe the Subject is bound to no more than the Law requires: But, if the Law be amended and enlarged by the ſame Authority that made it, it is no longer a perfect Rule of Obedience; but, to make it ſuch, it muſt be taken jointly with the Corrections and Enlargements made by the proper Authority.

3. Hence it follows, That to alter or add to a Law once conſidered as a perfect Rule of Obedience, when an Alteration of Circumſtances requires it, is neither uſeleſs nor impertinent, but oftentimes the Effect of Wiſdom and Neceſſity.

4. To ſay that Revelation is unneceſſary, becauſe Reaſon is a perfect Rule, and at the ſame time to affirm that thoſe who have but an imperfect Uſe of Reaſon have no Need of Revelation, is a manifeſt Contradiction: To ſay farther, that thoſe who are

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in ſuch a State that actually they do not obey the Laws of Reaſon, and, morally ſpeaking, cannot obey, are nevertheleſs in ſuch a State as God intended they ſhould be in, is not only making God the Author of Evil, but it is aſcribing to him two inconſiſtent Intentions: For to argue that God gave Men Reaſon to be the Rule of their Obedience, is ſuppoſing that his original Intention is, that Men ſhould obey Reaſon; to argue at the ſame time that thoſe who live in Diſobedience to this Law are in the State which God intended them to be in, is to ſuppoſe that God intended the Law ſhould be obeyed, and not obeyed, at the ſame time. But to return:

We are not now arguing in behalf of any particular Revelation, which may be true or falſe for any thing that has hitherto been ſaid: But this I urge, That Revelation is the ſureſt Foundation of Religion; and this wants no other Proof than an Explication of the Terms: Religion, conſidered as a Rule, is the Knowledge of ſerving and pleaſing God: Revelation is the Declaration of God, how he would be ſerved, and what will pleaſe him: And, unleſs we know what will pleaſe God, better than he himſelf does, Revelation muſt be the beſt Rule to ſerve and

and pleaſe God by, that is, it muſt be the beſt Religion.

From hence then, I ſay, it is incumbent on every Man of Senſe and Reaſon, upon every one who judges for himſelf in the Choice of his Religion, firſt to inquire whether there be a Revelation, or no: Nor can the Precepts of natural Religion ſingly be drawn into queſtion, till 'tis firſt certain, that there is no Revelation to direct us: And therefore there can be no Compariſon ſtated generally between natural and revealed Religion, in order to determine our Choice between them; becauſe the Revelation muſt be firſt rejected, before natural Religion can pretend to the ſole Direction.

And yet this is the beaten Path that Unbelievers tread: They conſider in general, that Revelation is ſubject to many Uncertainties; it may be a Cheat at firſt, or it may be corrupted afterwards, and not faithfully handed down to them; but in natural Religion there can be no Cheat, becauſe in that every Man judges for himſelf, and is bound to nothing but what is agreeable to the Dictates of Reaſon and his own Mind: And upon theſe general Views they reject all Revelations whatever, and adhere to natural Religion as the ſafer Guide. But attend

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to the Conſequence of this Reaſoning, which is this; That, becauſe there may be a falſe Revelation, therefore there cannot be a true one: For, unleſs this Conſequence be juſt, they are inexcuſable in rejecting all Revelations, becauſe of the Uncertainties which may attend them.

But now to apply what has been ſaid to the Chriſtian Revelation: It has ſuch Pretences, at leaſt, as may make it worthy of a particular Conſideration: It pretends to come from Heaven; to have been delivered by the Son of God; to have been confirmed by undeniable Miracles and Prophecies; to have been ratified by the Blood of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, who died in aſſerting its Truth: It can ſhew likewiſe an innumerable Company of Martyrs and Confeſſors: Its Doctrines are pure and holy, its Precepts juſt and righteous; its Worſhip is a reaſonable Service, refined from the Errors of Idolatry and Superſtition, and ſpiritual like the God who is the Object of it: It offers the Aid and Aſſiſtance of Heaven to the Weakneſs of Nature; which makes the Religion of the Goſpel to be as practicable, as it is reaſonable: It promiſes infinite Rewards to Obedience, and threatens eternal Puniſhment to obſtinate Offenders; which makes

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it of the utmoſt Conſequence to us ſoberly to conſider it, ſince every one who rejects it ſtakes his own Soul againſt the Truth of it.

Are theſe ſuch Pretences, as are to be turned off with general and looſe Objections? Becauſe Miracles may be pretended, ſhall not the Miracles of Chriſt be conſidered, which were not ſo much as queſtioned by the Adverſaries of the Goſpel in the firſt Ages? Becauſe there may be Impoſtors, ſhall Chriſt be rejected, whoſe Life was Innocence, and free from any Suſpicion of private Deſign, and who died to ſeal the Truths he had delivered? Becauſe there have been Cheats introduced by worldly Men, endeavouring to make a Gain of Godlineſs, ſhall the Goſpel be ſuſpected, that in every Page declares againſt the World, againſt the Pleaſures, the Riches, the Glories of it; that labours no one Thing more than to draw off the Affections from Things below, and to raiſe them to the Enjoyment of heavenly and ſpiritual Delights?

But, whether you will conſider it, or no; yet there is ſuch a Call to you to conſider it, as muſt render your Neglect inexcuſable. You cannot ſay you want Inducement to conſider it, when you ſee it entertained by Men of all Degrees. The Goſpel does not

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make ſo mean a Figure in the World, as to juſtify your Contempt of it: The Light ſhines forth in the World, whether you will receive it, or no; if you receive it not, the Conſequence is upon your own Soul, and you muſt anſwer it.

Were Men ſincere in their Profeſſions of Religion, or even in their Deſires of Salvation and Immortality, the Controverſies in Religion would ſoon take a new Turn: The only Queſtion would be, whether the Goſpel were true, or no: We ſhould have no Reaſoning againſt Revelation in general; for 'tis impoſſible that a ſincerely religious Man ſhould not wiſh for a Revelation of God's Will, if there be not one already: We ſhould then ſee another kind of Induſtry uſed in ſearching the Truths of God, which are now overlooked, becauſe Men have loſt their Regard for the Things which make for their Salvation. Were the Goſpel but a Title to an Eſtate, there is not an Infidel of them all, who would ſit down contented with his own general Reaſonings againſt it: It would then be thought worth looking into, its Proofs would be conſidered, and a juſt Weight allowed them: And yet the Goſpel is our Title, our only Title, to a much nobler Inheritance than this World knows;

'tis the Patent by which we claim Life and Immortality, and all the Joys and Bleſſings of the heavenly *Canaan*. Had any Man but a Pedigree as antient as the Goſpel, what a Noiſe ſhould we have about it? And yet the Goſpel is deſpiſed, which ſets forth to us a nobler Pedigree than the Kings of the Earth can boaſt; a Deſcent from Chriſt, who is Head over the whole Family; by which we claim as Heirs of God, and Co-heirs with Chriſt: And, did we not deſpiſe our Relation with Chriſt, and ſecretly abhor and dread the Thoughts of Immortality, we could not be ſo cold in our Regard to the Goſpel of God.

I wiſh every Man, who argues againſt the Chriſtian Religion, would take this one ſerious Thought along with him; That he muſt one Day, if he believes that God will judge the World, argue the Caſe once more at the Judgment-Seat of God: And let him try his Reaſons accordingly. Do you reject the Goſpel, becauſe you will admit nothing that pretends to be a Revelation? Conſider well; is it a Reaſon that you will juſtify to the Face of God? Will you tell him, that you had reſolved to receive no poſitive Commands from him, nor to admit any of his

Declarations for Law? If it will not be a good Reaſon then, it is not a good Reaſon now; and the ſtouteſt Heart will tremble to give ſuch an impious Reaſon to the Almighty, which is a plain Defiance to his Wiſdom and Authority.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE I.

PART III.

A Fairer Iſſue there cannot be for the Trial of any Religion: For, ſince eternal Life is the End that all Men aim at by Religion, that muſt neceſſarily be the beſt Religion, which moſt certainly leads us to this great and deſirable Bleſſing. But the Difficulty is, how to apply this Rule, ſo as to form our Judgments upon it, and direct our Choice, ſince all Religions pretend *to have the Words of eternal Life*; which makes it neceſſary for us firſt to enable ourſelves to determine which are, and which are not, *Words of eternal Life*, before this Rule can be of any Service to us in diſtinguiſhing true and genuine Religion from the

ſpecious Pretences of Counterfeits and Impoſtors. In order to this, we muſt conſider, that there are ſome Principles which in all Religions are allowed, and from the Conſideration of which we may poſſibly come to ſome fixed Determination in this Matter: Such are theſe; That Life eternal can be had only from God, who is the Author and Fountain of all Being: That from him the only Way to obtain it, is, by living and converſing in this World agreeably to his holy Will: From whence it evidently follows, That, ſince to do the Will of God is the only Way of obtaining eternal Life, the Words which inſtruct us in the Knowledge of God's Will, muſt needs be *the Words of eternal Life*. Thus far we can go, upon mere Principles of Reaſon.

From hence the Way lies open and plain to another Conſequence of ſome Importance in the preſent Queſtion: For, ſince it is the Perfection of Religion, conſidered as a Rule or Inſtitution, to direct us in all Things to act according to the Will of God, when we inquire from what Principle we ought to derive our Religion, we do in truth inquire from what Principle we may beſt derive the Knowledge of God's Will; for the Knowledge of God's Will is univerſally acknowledged

ledged to be the true and proper Rule and Meaſure of our religious Obedience in all Things.

There are but two Ways by which we can poſſibly arrive at this Knowledge: One is, by following the Dictates of Reaſon and Nature; when from that Knowledge of God and his Attributes, which Reaſon and Nature furniſh us with, we infer his Right of governing, and our Duty of obeying; and when from the Holineſs and Purity of God, and the neceſſary Difference between Good and Evil, we infer wherein our Obedience muſt conſiſt, namely, in ſerving an holy God in holy Things, and in keeping ourſelves pure and undefiled from Evil, even as he is pure: And this is called Natural Religion. The other Way by which we may poſſibly arrive at the Knowledge of God's Will, is, by having it declared to us, either immediately by God himſelf, or by others ſufficiently authoriſed and commiſſioned by him to make ſuch Declaration in his Name: And this is what we call Revelation. And, as Nature and Revelation are the only Ways by which we can come to the underſtanding of God's Will; ſo, for that Reaſon, they are the only Principles from which Religion can derive itſelf.

Between theſe two, conſidered purely as Principles of religious Knowledge, it is no hard Matter to judge, which is the ſafeſt and ſecureſt for us to rely on; it being a Matter that will bear no Diſpute, whether our own Reaſon or God himſelf can beſt inſtruct us in the Knowledge of his Will; upon which ſingle Point the whole Controverſy between Nature and Revelation, turns, as long as they are conſidered only as Principles of Religion, without drawing into the Queſtion the Merits of any particular Revelation, or of any particular Scheme or Syſtem of Natural Religion: The Conſequence of which is plainly this; That, as Nature is a better Guide than any pretended Revelation, ſo every true Revelation, as far as it goes, is a better Guide than Nature.

The laſt Conſequence, and for the ſake of which I have made this Deduction hitherto, is, That, when any particular Revelation is to be examined, when it lies before us to be received, or to be rejected, it is ~~obſerved~~ always in the very nature of the Thing, to put the Determination upon a Compariſon between Natural Religion and Revelation, conſidered in themſelves; ſince, if the Revelation be falſe, there want no Arguments to make it

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yield to Nature; and, if it be true, no Arguments can be ſufficient.

And thus it appears, that the very Topic itſelf is excluded, from which the Deiſts of the preſent Age fetch their main Support, and all the plauſible Arguments by which they labour to explode the Goſpel, and to render it uſeleſs and inſignificant, and conſequently vile and contemptible in the Opinion of the World.

Upon the ſame Principle we may proceed to examine other general Objections made uſe of in oppoſition to the Revelation of Chriſt Jeſus. The Goſpel is a Diſpenſation of Providence in regard to Mankind, which the Reaſon of Man cannot fathom, nor his utmoſt Sagacity ſearch into; which the Angels themſelves *deſire to look into*, and, after all their Inquiries, are content to reverence and adore at an awful Diſtance. Theſe Methods of Salvation are Matter of great Complaint with Unbelievers: They think it highly unreaſonable, that God ſhould propoſe ſuch Things as Objects of Faith; and from the Unreaſonableneſs of the Impoſition they argue, (which, preſuppoſed, they conclude not much amiſs) that theſe Terms of Salvation were not of God's Contrivance, but are owing to the Guile and Deceit of

cunning Impoſtors, who took Pleaſure in abuſing Mankind.

Tho' this Objection is levelled againſt the Chriſtian Revelation particularly; yet it muſt conclude equally againſt Revelation in general, conſidered as a Principle of Religion, if it makes any Addition to the Things to be done or believed beyond what Reaſon teaches us. The Queſtion then will be, Whether it can be reaſonable for God to propoſe any Articles of Faith, or any Conditions of Salvation, the Reaſon and Propriety of which does not appear to Man? And this is a Queſtion of great Importance, it being confeſſedly the Caſe of the Goſpel.

In the Senſe of the Goſpel, whatever is, the Effect of God's ſecret Counſels, in order to the Redemption of the World, is a Myſtery. That Men ought to obey God in Truth and Holineſs, that they may obtain his Bleſſing, — That Sinners ought to be puniſhed, — are not, nor ever were, Myſteries; becauſe theſe Things were ſufficiently publiſhed to the World, when Men were endued with Reaſon. But all the Methods of Religion beyond theſe were, and ſtill are, myſterious: The Intention of God to redeem the World from Sin by ſending his own Son in the Likeneſs of Man, is a Myſtery unknown

unknown to former Ages; 'tis a Myſtery ſtill, inaſmuch as we cannot penetrate into the Depths of this divine OEconomy, or account by the Principles of human Reaſon for every Step or Article of it. But let it be remembered, That not human Reaſon, but the Will of God, is the Rule and Meaſure of religious Obedience; and, if ſo, the Terms of religious Obedience muſt be tried by their Agreeableneſs to the Will of God, and not meaſured by the narrow Compaſs of Man's Reaſon. If Reaſon can diſcover, either by internal or external Signs, the Conditions of Salvation propoſed to us to be the Will of God, the Work of Reaſon is over, and we are obliged to uſe the Means, which are preſcribed by God, as we hope to obtain the End, which is the Gift of God: And, how little ſoever Reaſon can penetrate into the Myſteries of God; yet, if it can diſcover them to be indeed the Myſteries of God, and by him propoſed to us as neceſſary to Salvation, it diſcovers plainly to us, that theſe Myſteries of God are *the Words of eternal Life*; which is all, I think, that a reaſonable Man would deſire to find in his Religion: For, ſince all that he deſires to obtain by his Religion is eternal Life, what more

more has he to look for in his Religion, than *the Words*, or Means, *of eternal Life?*

This is true, you'll ſay, upon Suppoſition of God's requiring the Belief of Myſteries or the Practice of any poſitive Duties from us; then it will be our Duty to hearken to his Voice, and entirely ſubmit our Wills and and Underſtandings to him: But how does this prove it reaſonable for him ſo to do, or remove the Prejudice that lies againſt the Goſpel, becauſe of its myſterious Doctrines?

To come then to the Point: It will, I ſuppoſe, be eaſily granted to be agreeable to the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to reveal whatever is neceſſary to be revealed in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind; as, on the other Side, it muſt be allowed, that it is not conſiſtent with infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs to reveal Myſteries merely to puzzle the Minds of Men. Theſe Allowances being made on each Side, the Queſtion is reduced to this; Whether it can be ever neceſſary to reveal Myſteries in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind? Wherever it is neceſſary, it muſt be reaſonable, unleſs it be unreaſonable for God to ſave the World: And upon this Foot it will be found, That a Revelation cannot have *the*

Words

Words of eternal Life, without opening to us all neceſſary Truths, how abſtruſe and myſterious ſoever ſome of them may be.

With reſpect to infinite Wiſdom, there is no ſuch Thing as Myſtery in Nature: All Things are equally clear in the Underſtanding of the Deity; all Things lie naked before his Eye, having no Darkneſs, Obſcurity, or Difficulty in them. A Myſtery therefore, is no real or poſitive Thing in Nature; nor is it any Thing that is inherent or belonging to the Subjects of which it is predicated. When we ſay this Thing or that Thing is a Myſtery, according to the Form of our Speech, we ſeem to affirm ſomething of this or that Thing; but, in truth, the Propoſition is not affirmative with reſpect to the Thing, but negative with reſpect to ourſelves: For, when we ſay this Thing is a Myſtery, of the Thing we ſay nothing, but of ourſelves we ſay, that we do not comprehend this Thing. With reſpect to our Underſtanding, there is no more Difference between Truth that is, and Truth that is not myſterious, than, with reſpect to our Strength, there is between a Weight which we can lift, and a Weight which we cannot lift: For, as Defect of Strength in us makes ſome Weights to be unmoveable, ſo

likewiſe Defect of Underſtanding makes ſome Truths to be myſterious.

The Complaint then againſt Myſteries in Religion amounts to no more than this; That God has done ſomething for us, or appointed ſomething for us to do, in order to ſave us, the Reaſon of which we do not underſtand; and requires us to believe and to comply with theſe Things, and to truſt him that we ſhall receive the Benefit of them: For this is all the Faith, or poſitive Obedience, that is required of us; as will in its due Place appear.

But to return to the Queſtion, Whether it can be ever neceſſary for God to reveal Myſteries, or appoint poſitive Duties, in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind; or, in other Words, to uſe ſuch Means for the Salvation of the World, the Agreeableneſs of which to the End intended the Reaſon of Man cannot diſcover? This is certain, That, whenever 'tis out of our Power by natural Means to ſave ourſelves, if we are to be ſaved at all, 'tis neceſſary that ſupernatural Means be made uſe of; And, how hard ſoever it may be to conceive this to be the Caſe of Mankind in general; yet of particular Men it will not, I preſume, be denied, but that they may ſin ſo far, and render themſelves

ſelves ſo obnoxious to the Juſtice of God, that it ſhall not be in the Power of mere Reaſon and Nature to find an infallible Method of atoning the Juſtice of God, and, conſequently, redeeming the Sinner from Death: And in this Caſe there is a plain Neceſſity that the Sinner muſt periſh, or be redeemed by ſuch Means as Reaſon and Nature are Strangers to; ſince, in the Means that Reaſon and Nature can preſcribe, there is confeſſedly no Help for him.

What may confeſſedly happen to one Man, or to many, may poſſibly happen to all; Suppoſe then (ſince there is no Abſurdity in the Suppoſition) That all Men have ſo far ſinned, as to have loſt the Rights and Pleas of obedient Subjects: That an univerſal Corruption has ſpread through the whole Race, and rendered them incapable of performing the Duties of Reaſon and Nature, or, if they could perform them, precluded the Merit and Title of all ſuch Works to Reward; for the Works of Nature, tho' they may prevent a Forfeiture, yet they cannot reverſe a Forfeiture once incurred: In this Caſe what ſhall be done? Is it unreaſonable for God to redeem the World? God forbid! and yet by the Means of Reaſon and Nature the World cannot be redeemed. Will you allow that

God

God may freely forgive the Sins of the World, and remit the Puniſhment, and beſtow even on Sinners the Gift of eternal Life? How myſterious would even this Grace be, and how far beyond the Power of Reaſon to comprehend? Could you, from any of the natural Notions of your Mind, reconcile this Method of Redemption with the Wiſdom, Juſtice, and Holineſs of God? Conſider the eſſential Difference between Good and Evil, the natural Beauty of one, and the natural Deformity of the other; compare them with the eſſential Holineſs of the Deity; and then tell me the Ground upon which he reconciles himſelf to Sin, pities and forgives it, and decrees immortal Glory for the Sinner: Or, if this Way pleaſe you not, conſider his Wiſdom, by which he rules and governs the World, and try, by all the Notions you can frame of Wiſdom, whether it be not neceſſary for the good Government of the rational World, that Rewards and Puniſhments ſhould be divided with an equal Hand to Virtue and Vice; and then tell me, where is the Wiſdom of dropping all the Puniſhment due to Sin, and receiving Sinners not only to Pardon, but to Glory? There may be Wiſdom and Holineſs in this, but not human Wiſdom, nor Holineſs

that

that human Reaſon can diſcern; but infinite myſterious Wiſdom and Holineſs. If from the Notions of Wiſdom and Holineſs you can have no Help in this Caſe, much leſs will the natural Notion of Juſtice aſſiſt you: Is not Juſtice converſant in Rewards and Puniſhments? Is it not the Eſſence of Juſtice to diſtribute both where they are due? Is there not in Nature and Reaſon a Connection between Virtue and Reward, between Vice and Puniſhment? How then comes Nature to be reverſed, and the Laws of Reaſon to be diſturbed? and how, as if Juſtice were more than poetically blind, come Sinners to be intitled to Life and Happineſs? Even in this Caſe therefore, of God's finally forgiving the Sins of the World, which is the loweſt that can be put, Religion would neceſſarily be myſterious, and not to be apprehended by Reaſon or Nature, but to be received by Faith; and our only Refuge would be, not in the Reaſon and Nature of the Thing, but in the unfathomable Goodneſs and incomprehenſible Mercy of God.

But, ſhould it really be, as to human Reaſon it appears, inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom and Juſtice of God, ſo freely to pardon Sin, as not to leave the Marks of his Diſpleaſure upon it, or to remit the Tranſgreſſions

Tranſgreſſions of Men, without vindicating in the Face of the whole Creation the Honour of his Laws and Government; in what a Maze muſt Reaſon then be loſt in ſearching after the Means of Reconcilement and Redemption! How ſhall Sin be puniſh'd, and yet the Sinner ſaved? How ſhall the Honour of God's Government be vindicated in the Face of all the World, and yet in the Face of all the World the Rebels juſtified and exalted? Theſe are Difficulties irreconcileable to human Reaſon and Nature; and yet they muſt be reconciled, or the World, once loſt, muſt lie for ever under Condemnation. The Religion that can adjuſt this Difficulty, and give us the Clue to lead us thro' theſe Mazes, in which human Reaſon muſt for ever wander, can only have *the Words of eternal Life*; which *Words of eternal Life* muſt neceſſarily abound with inconceivable Myſteries, but with Myſteries of Grace and Mercy.

So far is it from being an Objection againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt, That it contains many wonderful Myſteries of the hidden Wiſdom of God, that, as our Caſe ſtands, without a Myſtery 'tis impoſſible for us to be ſaved: For, ſince Reaſon and Nature cannot find the Means of reſcuing Sinners from Puniſh-

ment, and of making Atonement to the Juſtice of God; ſince they cannot preſcribe a proper Satisfaction for Sin, in which the Honour of God and the Salvation of Men ſhall be at once conſulted; ſince they cannot remedy the Corruption that has ſpread thro' the Race of Mankind, or infuſe new Principles of Virtue and Holineſs into the Souls already ſubdued to the Luſt and Power of Sin; ſince, if they could procure our Pardon for what is paſt, they cannot ſecure us for the future from the ſame Temptations, which by fatal Experience we know we cannot withſtand: Since, I ſay, theſe Things cannot be done by the Means of Reaſon and Nature, they muſt be done by ſuch Means as Reaſon and Nature know nothing of; that is, in other Words, they muſt be done by myſterious Means, of the Propriety of which we can have no adequate Notion or Conception.

If you ſtand in need of no new Favour, if you aim not ſo high as eternal Life, Religion without Myſteries may well ſerve your Turn. The Principles of natural Religion tend to procure the Peace and Tranquillity of this Life; and the not diſtinguiſhing between Religion as a Rule of Life for

our preſent Uſe and Well-being here, and as the Means of obtaining Pardon for Sin and eternal Life hereafter, may have in ſome meaſure occaſioned the great Complaint againſt the Myſteries of the Goſpel: For Myſteries are not indeed the neceſſary Parts of Religion, conſidered only as a Rule of Action; but moſt neceſſary they are to it, when conſidered as a Means of obtaining Pardon and eternal Glory. And this farther ſhews, how unreaſonably Men object againſt the myſterious Wiſdom of the Goſpel, ſince all that the Goſpel preſcribes to us as our Duty is plain and evident; all that is myſterious is on God's Part, and relates entirely to the ſurprizing Acts of divine Wiſdom and Mercy in the Redemption of the World. Conſider the Goſpel then as a Rule of Action, no Religion was ever ſo plain, ſo calculated upon the Principles of Reaſon and Nature; ſo that natural Religion itſelf had never more natural Religion in it. If we conſider the End propoſed to us, and the Means uſed to intitle us to the Benefit of it, it grows myſterious, and ſoars above the Reach of human Reaſon; for God has done more for us than Reaſon could teach us to expect, or can now teach us to comprehend.

Let

Let us then do our Part, which we plainly underſtand, and let us truſt in God that he will do his; though it exceeds the Strength of human Wiſdom to comprehend the Length and Depth and Breadth of that Wiſdom and Mercy, which God has manifeſted to the World thro' his Son Chriſt Jeſus, our Lord.

DISCOURSE I.

PART IV.

AS, with reſpect to the Health of the Body, there is one Regimen proper to preſerve and maintain a ſound Conſtitution, and another to aſſiſt and reſtore a broken and diſtempered one; the one Caſe requiring little more than wholeſome Food and Temperance, the other calling for all that the Help and Skill of the Phyſician can furniſh: So it is in Religion. An innocent Man has nothing more to do than to preſerve his Innocence, which is his Title to the Favour of God; and therefore his Religion is only a Rule of Life, directing him in all Things how to preſerve his Integrity, and walk uprightly with his God. This is the

firſt and the natural Notion of Religion; becauſe the firſt and natural State of Mankind was a State of Innocence, and required no other Religion than this. Here indeed there is no room for any thing myſterious, this Religion being founded merely in the natural Notions of Juſtice and Equity, and the neceſſary Difference between Good and Evil: Nor is it at all to be wondered at, that, whilſt Men conſider Religion under this ſingle View, and imagine that whatever is to be done for their Salvation is to be done by themſelves, and that Religion is only the Rule directing them how to do it, they ſhould ſee no Uſe of Myſteries, nor, conſequently, any Reaſon to admit them.

But, upon Suppoſition of Men's becoming Sinners, and liable to the Diſpleaſure and Wrath of God, Religion itſelf becomes a new Thing. Innocence, which once was all the Care Religion had, is now vaniſhed, and with it all our Hopes of Glory and Immortality. The natural Attributes of God, which to the Eyes of Innocence afforded a pleaſant Proſpect, to the Eyes of Sinners are exceeding dreadful. What then ſhall the Sinner do? Shall he ſeek to natural Religion in this Diſtreſs? But, if this Religion be nothing but a Rule of living well, what is that to him,

him, who has already lived ſo ill as to be obnoxious to Condemnation? As well may you ſend the condemned Malefactor to ſtudy the Law by which he dies, in order to ſave his Life, as the Sinner to the perfect Rule of Life, which he has tranſgreſſed, in order to ſave his Soul. The more he ſtudies the Rule by which he ſhould have lived, and compares it with his own Tranſgreſſions, he will but the more fully comprehend how much he deſerves Puniſhment, and how deſperate the State is to which his Sin has reduced him. In a Religion, which is barely a Rule of Life, there is no ſure Comfort or Support to be had againſt the Terrors of Guilt and Sin.

Unbelievers may think we aſk too much of them to be granted, when we argue upon this Suppoſition, *That all are Sinners, and are fallen ſhort of the Glory of God:* But, as this is the Suppoſition upon which the Goſpel uniformly proceeds, pretending to no more than to provide Means of Salvation for Sinners, whoever takes upon himſelf to queſtion the Reaſonableneſs of the Goſpel, muſt conſider it as being what it pretends to be; otherwiſe he will not argue againſt the Goſpel, but againſt ſomething elſe form'd in his own Imagination. If, upon Examina-

tion of the Goſpel, it appears to be indeed, what it pretends to be, a Means for ſaving Sinners, you muſt neceſſarily come to one or other of the following Reſolutions: If you are conſcious to yourſelf that you are a Sinner, you muſt gladly receive the Remedy provided for you, and which upon Examination you find to be proper for your Caſe; or, if you are ſatisfied with yourſelf, and want no Help, you muſt reject it as unneceſſary and improper in your Caſe, and truſt entirely to your own Merit; and muſt appear before God, and demand Life and Immortality as due from his Juſtice and Equity, which you will not accept as a Gift from his Grace and Mercy.

Let us then conſider what is neceſſary to be done for a Sinner, in order to reſtore him to eternal Life; and that will teach us the true Notion of that Religion mentioned in the Text, and which are *the Words of eternal Life*; and will enable us to judge what Weight there is in the Objection raiſed againſt ſuch a Religion from the Additions which it makes to natural Religion.

Firſt then, 'Tis neceſſary, in order to reſtore a Sinner to eternal Life, That God be reconciled to him:

Secondly,

Secondly, That the Sinner be purged from the Impurity contracted by Sin:

Thirdly, That for the future he be enabled to obey the holy Laws of God, without which his Reconcilement to God would be fruitleſs and of no Effect.

I think there needs but little to be ſaid to prove the Neceſſity of theſe Conditions: If the Sinner's Caſe be deſperate, becauſe God is provoked by his Iniquity, and juſtly angry at his Offences; there can be no Foundation for him to hope, till God be reconciled to him: If Sinners are impure and odious in the Sight of God, becauſe of their Sins; their Impurity muſt be cleanſed, before he can again take pleaſure in them, and delight to do them Good: If the Tranſgreſſion of the Laws of Reaſon and Nature, which are the Laws of God, was that which loſt him the Favour of God; that he may not loſe it again, after being reconciled to him, 'tis neceſſary that he ſin no more, or, if he does, that a Remedy be provided to reſtore him.

Allowing then theſe Conditions to be neceſſary to the Salvation of a Sinner, and likewiſe that Religion muſt contain *the Words*, or Means, *of eternal Life*; it neceſſarily follows, That the Sinner's Religion muſt contain

tain the Means by which he may be reconciled to God; the Means by which he may be purified and cleanſed from Sin; and the Means by which he may be enabled for the future to obey the Will of God: For theſe are the neceſſary Means by which a Sinner muſt be ſaved; and therefore they muſt neceſſarily be contained in the Sinner's Religion. How imperfect a Notion then have we of ſuch a Religion, when we conſider it only as a Rule of Action! and how weakly muſt we argue againſt it, when our Arguments are pointed only againſt this Notion or Idea of it!

A Rule of Action muſt be plain and intelligible, or elſe it is no Rule; for we can neither obey nor diſobey a Law that we cannot underſtand: And therefore from this Idea of Religion, That it is a Rule of Action, there lies a very plain Objection againſt admitting Myſteries in Religion: And let the Objection have its full Force, the Goſpel is ſecure from the Blow; for the Rule of Life contained in the Goſpel is the plaineſt, as well as the pureſt, that ever the World was acquainted with. In the Precepts of Chriſtianity there is no Myſtery, no Shadow of a Myſtery, to be ſeen; they are all ſimple, and to Men of the loweſt

Underſtandings intelligible; the Duties which it requires us to perform to God, to Ourſelves, and to our Neighbours, are ſuch as, when offered to us, we cannot but in our Minds and Conſciences approve: And therefore the Goſpel, as far as it is a Rule of Life, is far from being myſterious, ſince both the Senſe and the Reaſon of the Law are open and plain, and ſuch as we cannot but ſee, and, when we ſee, conſent to.

But, ſince this is not the only Notion or Idea of Religion, That it is a Rule of Life; let us conſider whether, according to the other Ideas which belong to it, it be equally abſurd to ſuppoſe it in ſome Points myſterious. Let us examine it then under this Notion, as containing the Means by which God is reconciled to Sinners.

And firſt, 'tis obvious to obſerve, that here is not the ſame Reaſon againſt Myſteries as in the other Caſe: For, tho' we cannot practiſe a Law without underſtanding it, yet God may be reconciled to us, and we have the Aſſurance of it, without our being able to comprehend and account for every thing that was done in order to it. A Malefactor may receive a Pardon, and enjoy the Benefit of it, without knowing what it was that induced his Prince to grant it; and would, without

without doubt, be thought mad to ſtand out againſt the Mercy, merely becauſe he could not dive into the ſecret Reaſons of it. Could not a Sinner receive the Benefit of God's Mercy, without underſtanding all the Methods of it, it would then be neceſſary indeed, that even this Part of Religion ſhould be free from Myſteries, and made plain to every Man's Underſtanding: But, ſince a Sinner may be ſaved by a Mercy which he cannot comprehend, where is the Abſurdity of offering Sinners Mercy, and requiring them to rely on it, or, in other Words, to believe in it, tho' it be never ſo incomprehenſible or myſterious? Were it unreaſonable or impoſſible to believe Things to be, without knowing how they came to be, Faith could never be reaſonable in Religion, or in any thing elſe: But, ſince the Knowledge of the Eſſence of Things, and of the Exiſtence of Things, are two diſtinct Kinds of Knowledge, and independent of one another; our Ignorance of the Eſſence of Things, and of the Relation they have to each other, can never be a good Argument againſt the Belief of their Exiſtence: And yet this Objection contains all the Argument that Unbelievers bring againſt the Myſteries of Chriſtianity. Why do they, for Inſtance, refuſe

refuſe to believe Chriſt to be the Son of God? only becauſe they cannot comprehend how he can be the eternal Son of God: And, if they will be true to their Principle, and carry the Objection as far as it will go, they muſt in time come to deny the Exiſtence of every thing in the World, themſelves not excepted. Since then to comprehend the Reaſon and Nature of Things, is neither neceſſary to our believing the Reality of them, nor yet to our receiving Benefit and Advantage from them; how comes it to be neceſſary, that in Religion there ſhould be nothing that we do not underſtand? Neceſſary it cannot be to our Salvation, for we may be ſaved by Means we comprehend not; nor yet to our Faith is it neceſſary, for we may, and do daily believe the Reality of Things without knowing any thing of the Nature and Reaſons of them. And, if Myſteries may ſet forward our Salvation, and are not deſtructive of our Faith, upon what other Views they can be excluded from Religion, I cannot conceive.

Thus much then may ſerve to ſhew, that according to this Notion of Religion, That it contains the Means by which God is reconciled to Sinners, no Argument can be drawn to weaken the Authority of any Religion, becauſe

becauſe ſome Parts of it are myſterious: But, if you conſider it farther, it will appear that this Part of Religion muſt neceſſarily be myſterious, and the Means of Reconcilement ſuch as Reaſon and Nature cannot comprehend. This I partly obſerved to you in a former Part of this Diſcourſe, and ſhall therefore the more briefly touch it now.

The Principles, from which this Conſequence I think will follow, are theſe: That Men are Sinners: That God muſt be reconciled to Sinners in order to their Salvation: That Religion muſt contain *the Words of eternal Life*, or the certain Method by which we may obtain eternal Life. The Conſequence of theſe Principles is evident, That Religion muſt contain the Means by which God is reconciled to Sinners; for, ſince this Reconcilement is neceſſary to eternal Life, Religion cannot have *the Words of eternal Life* without it. Now then, if there be no ſuch Means of Reconcilement, which Reaſon and Nature can either diſcover or comprehend, this Part of Religion muſt neceſſarily be myſterious; ſince what Reaſon cannot comprehend, is myſterious. Now, from the natural Notion we have of God and his Attributes, there ariſes ſuch a Difficulty in this Caſe, as Reaſon cannot get over:

For

For tis certain, according to all the natural Notions of our Mind, That it is juſt for God to puniſh Sinners: 'Tis likewiſe certain, That God can do nothing but what is juſt: If therefore he forgives Sinners, and receives them to Mercy, and remits their Puniſhment; 'tis then certain, That 'tis juſt for God in this Circumſtance not to puniſh Sinners. Now, Reaſon cannot comprehend how it ſhould, with reſpect to the ſame individual Sinners, be juſt to puniſh, and juſt not to puniſh them. If it be not juſt to puniſh Sinners, there wants no Reconcilement for Sinners; and, if it be not juſt not to puniſh them, no Reconcilement can be had, for 'tis contrary to the Nature of God to do what is not juſt. The ſame Argument lies from all the Attributes of the Deity, which are at all concerned in the Redemption of Mankind: His Wiſdom and Holineſs, and even his Mercy, are as indiſcernible as his Juſtice. Now try how far Reaſon can go towards diſcovering the Means of Reconcilement: Lay down firſt theſe certain and allowed Principles; That it is juſt for God to puniſh Sinners, — That God can do nothing but what is juſt: And try how you can come at the other Concluſion, which muſt be the Foundation of a Sinner's Reconcilement to God;

God; namely, That it is juſt for God not to puniſh Sinners, and righteous in him to receive them to Favour. If Reaſon cannot diſcover nor comprehend how both theſe Propoſitions ſhould be true at the ſame time with reſpect to the ſame Perſons, 'tis impoſſible that it ſhould diſcover or comprehend the Means which God makes uſe of to reconcile himſelf to Sinners; that is, it is impoſſible for God to make uſe of any Means that are not myſterious, that is, above the Reach and Comprehenſion of human Wiſdom.

This Difficulty muſt for ever remain, as long as we attempt to ſcan the divine Juſtice by our narrow Conceptions of it: And this is the very Difficulty that makes many Things in the Goſpel to be myſterious. The Scripture tells us, *That God has been reconciled to Sinners by the Death of Chriſt,* — *That he made Atonement for the Sins of the whole World.* Theſe are great Myſteries: We cannot ſee that there is any Proportion between the Sufferings of one and the Sins of all; or, if there were, we cannot ſee the Juſtice of laying the Sins of the Wicked upon the innocent Head. If we could ſee the Reaſons upon which the Juſtice of God proceeds in this Caſe, here would be no Myſtery:

Myſtery: And therefore the Myſteriouſneſs of the whole Proceeding ariſes only from hence, That our finite Minds cannot comprehend the Reaſons and Limits of the divine Juſtice. Moſt certain it is, That, if God be reconciled to Sinners, Satisfaction muſt be made to his Juſtice; for he may as well ceaſe to be God, as to be juſt. Whatever Satisfaction is made, it muſt be founded in the Reaſons of his own Juſtice, that is, of Juſtice directed by infinite Wiſdom. The Reaſons of ſuch Juſtice we cannot comprehend; and therefore we muſt either be ſaved by Means that are myſterious to us, or God muſt give us infinite Wiſdom to comprehend the Reaſon of his Juſtice. You ſee then, that from this Notion of Religion, conſidered as containing the Means by which God reconciled himſelf to the World, 'tis ſo far from being abſurd to ſuppoſe it in ſome Parts myſterious, that it is not poſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe.

To redeem the World is the Work of God: He only could find the Means of Reconciliation, and he only could apply them: 'Tis our Part merely to accept them, and to obey the Terms and Conditions upon which he offers them. Religion therefore, which is founded upon Redemption, muſt

needs conſiſt of theſe two Parts; An Account of the Redemption wrought by God, and Inſtructions to Men upon what Terms they may reap the Benefit of the Redemption. As far as our Part goes in the Goſpel, there is nothing myſterious; we have nothing to do for ourſelves, but what we very well know how to do. As to the other Parts of the Goſpel, we are not required to comprehend and account for God's Methods of Salvation, but only to accept them; which, as I before obſerved, are two diſtinct Acts of the Mind, and not dependent upon each other. As for the Work of God in our Redemption, 'tis indeed wonderful and myſterious: And why ſhould it ſeem ſtrange to you, that it is ſo? Are there any other Works of God which are not myſterious? Conſider the Creation and Formation of this World; conſider the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, the Works of his Hand; tell me by what ſecret Power they move, by what Rule their different Motions were at firſt impreſſed, and by what Secret in Nature or Providence ever ſince preſerved. Or, if you think it hard to be ſent to conſider the Heavens at a Diſtance, do but conſider the Earth, and the meaneſt Creatures of it: Can you tell how they are formed? how they *live, and move, and have their*

their Being? Nay, can you name that Work of God, which is not myſterious? Is there any Thing in Nature, the firſt Principles of which you can diſcover and ſee into? If in all the Works of God there is no ſuch Thing, why ſhould we think it ſtrange, That in his Work of Redemption he has appeared ſo like himſelf, and that in this, as in every thing elſe, *his Ways are paſt finding out?* We live by the Preſervation of Providence, and enjoy the Comforts and Pleaſures of this Life; and yet how myſterious is our Preſervation! How little do we know of the Methods by which we are preſerved! and yet the Benefits of it we enjoy, notwithſtanding our Ignorance of the Means: And why is it a greater Abſurdity to ſuppoſe that Men may be redeemed, without comprehending all the Means made uſe of in their Redemption? In all other Inſtances whatever, the Miraculouſneſs of an Eſcape adds to the Pleaſure and Joy of it, and is always remembered with a kind of Ecſtaſy in the Relation. Salvation is the only Inſtance in which Men demur upon the Means, and are unwilling to receive the Mercy, becauſe they cannot underſtand the Methods of obtaining it. In any other Caſe

a Man would be thought beſide himſelf, who ſhould act in the ſame Manner.

As to the two other Points, The cleanſing Sinners from their Iniquity, and enabling them to live virtuouſly for the future; or, in other Words, the Sanctification and Grace promiſed in the Goſpel; I ſhall not enter into the Conſideration of them particularly, becauſe the ſame Way of Reaſoning is applicable in theſe Caſes, *mutatis mutandis*; and therefore I ſhall leave them to your own Reflection.

Upon the whole; The only true and fair Way of judging of the Goſpel is, to conſider what is the true State of Mankind in the World. If Men are in a State of Purity and Innocence, no Redemption is wanting, and the Methods preſcribed in the Goſpel bear no Relation to their Circumſtances: But, if Men have every-where ſinned, and come ſhort of the Glory of God, the Law of Nature cannot help them to thoſe Bleſſings, which by the Law of Nature are forfeited; and there is manifeſtly a Neceſſity to have recourſe to other Means to obtain Salvation.

It may be ſaid, for it often is ſaid, That, whatever Degree of Light Men have, it will make little Difference in the Caſe; ſince an equitable Judge will conſider Men and

their Merits in proportion to their Abilities. Allowing this Maxim to be true, yet it plainly goes no farther than this; That God will not puniſh Men for not doing the Things which their natural Powers enabled them not to do. The Argument cannot go farther: You cannot argue from the Weakneſs or Stupidity of Men, that they ſhall be rewarded. It may be a good Reaſon not to beat a Man when he does amiſs, becauſe he is a Fool, and knows not what he does; but it is no Reaſon to honour or to advance him. And therefore a Religion founded in this favourite Principle cannot be ſaid *to have the Words of eternal Life*; for no Plea, no Claim for eternal Life can poſſibly be raiſed out of it.

Conſidering therefore Religion under the Character given in the Text, *That it has the Words of eternal Life*; we ſhall have Reaſon to conclude with St. *Peter*, That our only Hope is in God, and in him whom he hath ſent, our bleſſed Lord and Redeemer; and with him to ſay, *Lord, whither ſhall we go? Thou, Thou only, haſt the Words of eternal Life. And we believe, and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

DISCOURSE II.

HEBREWS vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able alſo to ſave them to the uttermoſt, that come unto God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make Interceſſion for them.

WHEN we conſider the great and wonderful Work of our Redemption, though we cannot account for every Step of it to our own Reaſon and Underſtanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the Effect of mere Will and arbitrary Appointment, and void of all Foundation in the Reaſon and Propriety of Things. All the Works of God are Works of Wiſdom; and, as far as our Capacities give us leave to judge, we diſcern evident Marks of Wiſdom

in them all, and diſcover a Fitneſs and Propriety in every thing with reſpect to the End which it is intended to ſerve or promote. If this be ſo in every Inſtance in which we are able to make any Judgment, it is a great Preſumption that it is, and muſt be, ſo in all other Inſtances, which are too high and great to be viewed and meaſured by human Underſtanding: And we have one poſitive Argument that it is ſo, ariſing from the natural Notion we have of God, and of his Attributes of Wiſdom and Juſtice. It is impoſſible to ſuppoſe ſuch a Being to do any thing by Chance, or in compliance to mere Will and Humour. No: Every Act of God is the Act of infinite Wiſdom, and is founded in the neceſſary Reaſon and Propriety of Things: And it is as true of the Works of Grace, as it is of the Works of Nature, That *in Wiſdom he has ordained them all.*

It is one thing not to be able to diſcern the Reaſons of Providence, and another to ſuppoſe there is no Reaſon in them. The Reaſons, that made it either neceſſary or proper for Chriſt to die for the Sins of Mankind, may be removed out of our Sight: But to ſuppoſe that Chriſt really did die for the Sins of the World, and yet that there was no Reaſon or Propriety in his ſo doing,

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is to found Revealed Religion upon a Principle deſtructive of Natural Religion; for no Religion can ſubſiſt, with an Opinion that God is a Being capable of acting without Reaſon.

The Publication of the Goſpel has made an Alteration in the Scheme of Religion, by revealing to us the Son of God, *whom God hath appointed Heir of all Things, by whom alſo he made the Worlds; who is the Brightneſs of his Glory, and the expreſs Image of his Perſon; who upholdeth all Things by the Word of his Power.* Heb. i. 2, 3.

The Knowledge of the Son of God, of his Power and Dominion in the creating and upholding all Things, became neceſſary, as the Foundation of the Faith required to be placed in him as our Redeemer. The Character of Redeemer would be but ill ſupported by any Perſon who had not Power equal to the great Undertaking. The New-Teſtament Doctrines therefore, relating to the Dignity and Authority of Jeſus Chriſt, are relative to his Office of Redeemer; and therefore there was no explicit Declaration of them either before or under the Law of *Moſes*.

Natural Religion leads us by certain Concluſions to the Acknowledgment of one ſupreme

ſupreme intelligent Being, the Author and Creator of all Things, and can by no Reaſoning whatever diſcover any other Being concerned in the making, framing, or governing the World: And therefore all the Hopes and Fears, in a Word, all the religious Acts of Man, in the State of natural Religion, are neceſſarily and immediately relative to this one ſupreme Being. But put the Caſe, that natural Religion could poſſibly diſcover that this one ſupreme Being had an eternal Son, to whom he had communicated all Power and Authority, who was the immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge of Mankind; I beſeech you to conſider, whether, upon this Suppoſition, there would not neceſſarily ariſe an Alteration in natural Religion; whether the Hopes and Fears, and all other religious Acts of Mankind would not relate immediately to this their immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge. Can it be reaſonably ſuppoſed that we were created by the Son of God, that we are now under his Government, and ſhall be finally under his Judgment, and at the ſame time maintained that no Service, Obedience, or Regard is due to him from us his Creatures and Subjects? If this cannot be maintained conſiſtently with this Suppoſition, the Concluſion will

will be, That the Religion of a Chriſtian is a natural and reaſonable Service, ariſing from the Relation between Chriſt and Mankind, which the Goſpel has revealed and made known to the World.

When we conſider what Expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what great Promiſes he has made to us in his Goſpel, we cannot poſſibly avoid inquiring who this this Perſon is: When we hear his Promiſe to be always preſent with us to the End of the World, to ſupport us under all our Difficulties, 'tis but a reaſonable Demand to aſk by what Authority he does theſe Things: And when we are told that he liveth for ever, and is the Lord of Life and of Glory, there is no room to doubt of his being *able to ſave us.* St. *Paul* tells us, that the Lord Jeſus Chriſt *ſhall change our vile Bodies, that they may be faſhioned like unto his glorious Body:* A great Expectation this! But conſider what the reaſonable Foundation of this Expectation is: St. *Paul* tells us, it is the Energy of Power with which Chriſt is endued, *whereby he is able even to ſubdue all Things to himſelf.* Our Saviour puts this Article upon the ſame Foot: Hear his Declaration; *Verily, verily I ſay unto you, The Hour is coming, and now is, when the*

Dead ſhall hear the Voice of the Son of God; and they that hear ſhall live. In the next Verſe the Reaſon follows; *For, as the Father hath Life in himſelf, ſo hath he given to the Son to have Life in himſelf.* John v. 25, 26. If the Son has Life in himſelf, even as the Father has Life in himſelf; if he is really endued with Power to which all Nature ſubmits and obeys, a Power ſufficient for the Creation of the World at firſt, and for the Preſervation ever ſince; we have Reaſon to conclude, that he is now as able to reſtore Life, as he was at firſt to give it; to call Men from the Grave into Being, as well as to call them out of nothing at the firſt Creation.

The Relation of Chriſt to Mankind as Creator and Governor conſidered, the Work of Redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other Hand: For, if Chriſt was the immediate Creator and Governor of the World, what Reaſon can you imagine why God ſhould reſume this Authority out of the Hands of his Son, or ſet up another to have Dominion and Authority over any Part of the Creation, which by natural Right belonged to him who made all Things? Were we to conſider one Perſon as our Creator, and another as our

Redeemer,

Redeemer; it would be extremely to the Diminution of the Honour and Regard due to the Creator, inaſmuch as the Bleſſing of Redemption would greatly outweigh the Benefit of Creation; and it would be natural to us to prefer the Love that delivered us from the Evils and Miſeries of the World, to that which placed us in them. In the daily Service of our Church we praiſe God for creating and preſerving us, but above all for his ineſtimable Love in the Redemption; which is very conſiſtent with Reſpect to one great Benefactor, who both made us and redeemed us: But, had any other Hand redeemed us, ſuch Expreſſion of Gratitude to him would have reflected Diſhonour upon the Creator.

St. *Paul* tells us expreſly, That Chriſt is Head of the Church; a Title founded in the Right of Redemption, *that in all Things he might have the Preeminence*; that, as he was the Head of all Creatures in virtue of having created them, ſo he might be the Head of the Church, the elect People of God, in virtue of having redeemed them: *For it pleaſed the Father, that in him ſhould all Fulneſs dwell*; that is, that Chriſt ſhould be all in all, the Head of the ſecond as well as of the firſt Creation. *Coloſſ.* i. 18.

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According to St. *Paul*'s Reaſoning here, if any other Perſon had redeemed the World, or if the World had been redeemed without Chriſt, he would not *have had the Pre-eminence in all Things*; which yet he had before Sin came into the World; and, conſequently, the Sin of the World would have been the Diminution of the Headſhip and Power of Chriſt. Upon theſe Principles of the Goſpel-Revelation we may diſcern ſome Propriety in Chriſt's coming to redeem the World: The Work was ſuch, that no Perſon of leſs Power could undertake it; and his Relation to the World was ſuch, as made it fit and proper to commit the Work to him.

The Redemption of Mankind is a Work which in the Event ſeems to concern Men only: But, conſidered as a Vindication of the Juſtice and Goodneſs of God towards his Creatures, it is a Work expoſed to the Conſideration of every intelligent Being in the Univerſe. Whether they may be ſuppoſed to inquire into God's Dealings with the Children of Men, we may judge by ourſelves. 'Tis little we know of the Fall of Angels; yet how has that employed human Curioſity! For every Man conſiders himſelf as having an Intereſt in the Juſtice

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and Equity of that ſupreme Being, under whoſe Government he lives; and by whoſe Judgment he muſt finally ſtand or fall. If we doubt whether the ſuperior Orders of Beings have the like Inclination, St. *Peter* will tell us, *That the Sufferings of Chriſt, and the Glory that ſhould follow, — are Things the Angels deſire to look into.* 1 Pet. i. 11—12. And indeed the Method of God's dealing with any rational Creature is a common Concern to all; and it is for the Honour of God's Government to be vindicated in the Sight of every intelligent Being, *that he may be juſtified in his Saying, and overcome when he is judged.*

If this be ſo, it muſt neceſſarily follow, That the Redemption by Chriſt, though it relates immediately to Men, muſt be agreeable to all the Reaſon and Relation of Things, known or diſcoverable by the higheſt intellectual Beings; and need I add, that there are many ſuch not diſcoverable by us?

'Tis certain that we are but a ſmall Part of the intellectual World: What Relation we bear to the other Parts, or to the Whole, we know not; and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the Whole muſt in his Dealings with every Part have regard to this common Relation, whether we underſtand

ſtand it, or no. The Author of the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *That Chriſt took not on him the Nature of Angels, but he took on him the Seed of Abraham.* Angels ſinned, and Men ſinned: Men only are redeemed. If God is juſt, there muſt be a Reaſon for this, though not within our Reach at preſent; and, when we come to know it, perhaps we may be no longer at a loſs to know that the Sacrifice of Chriſt was neceſſary to the Salvation of Men.

That there are many Orders of Beings ſuperior to Man, is a Propoſition ſo agreeable to Reaſon, that there is little room to doubt of it. All theſe Orders are in Scripture comprehended under the general Name of *Angel.* What Relation theſe Beings ſtand in to us in many Reſpects, I will not now inquire; but that they are not unconcerned Spectators in the Work of our Redemption, is evident. Our Saviour tells us, *There is Joy in the Preſence of the Angels of God over one Sinner that repenteth.* Luke xv. 10. Again; *He that overcometh, the ſame ſhall be clothed in white Raiment; and I will not blot out his Name out of the Book of Life, but I will confeſs his Name before my Father, and before his Angels.* Rev. iii. 5. Here the Angels are mentioned

mentioned as Witneſſes of the Juſtice of the Judgment, and not merely as Attendants to make up the Pomp and Ceremony of Judicature.

Since then the Juſtice and Equity of God in redeeming Men are Things which the Angels deſire and are concerned to look into; it is evident, That his Juſtice and Equity, and the Reaſons of Providence in this great Affair, may be diſcernible to the higheſt Order of intellectual Beings, though not diſcoverable by us, the loweſt.

That this is probably the Caſe, may be learnt from hence; That, where the Goſpel has revealed to us any of theſe Relations, not diſcoverable by human Reaſon, ſo far we can ſee the Reaſon and Propriety of this great Work of our Redemption.

But let us conſider how well theſe Principles and Doctrines of the Goſpel agree together, and how naturally the one flows from the other. When we view the ſad Condition of Mankind, the Sin, Folly, and Miſery, which are in the World; and then turn to contemplate the Perfections, the Wiſdom, and the Goodneſs of Him who made us; Nature raiſes ſome Hopes in us, that this Confuſion will ſome Day find a Remedy, and ourſelves a Releaſe, from the

Goodneſs and Wiſdom of Him who formed us. I blame not theſe Hopes; they are juſt, they are natural. But, if Nature had the Knowledge of the Son of God, and could diſcover that the World was made, and is upheld by his Power, that we are his immediate Creatures and Subjects; would it not be altogether as natural to found ſome Hopes upon this Relation? Should we not be willing to believe, that this great Perſon, who made us, would have ſome Compaſſion upon the Work of his own Hands? Should we not hope to find in him at leaſt an Interceſſor on our behalf, an *Advocate with the Father*? Should we not be inclined to recommend to him all our Pleas, to put all our Intereſt into his Hands, truſting that he could not want Bowels of Affection towards the Creatures whom he formed after his own Image and Likeneſs? I think, this would be but natural; and what more does the Goſpel require of us? It has diſcovered to us this Relation between Chriſt and the World, between Chriſt and the Church, and requires from us ſuch Hope and Faith, and ſuch Obedience, as naturally flow from this Relation; and could it poſſibly require leſs? Would it not be abſurd to tell us, that Chriſt is Lord of the World that is, and of that

which is to come, and not to require us to have Hope and Confidence in him? Would it not be abſurd to tell us, that he is the Lord of Life and Glory, and to bid us expect Life and Glory through any other Hands than his? Would it not be abſurd to tell us, that all Judgment is committed to the Son, and yet no Obedience due to him? or, that God has appointed him to be Head over all, and yet no Honour to be paid him?

From theſe and the like Conſiderations we may diſcern, how reaſonable, how natural the Religion of the Goſpel is. It has indeed opened to us a new Scene of Things, diſcovering to us the ever-bleſſed Son of God, the Creator and Governor of the World: What elſe it propoſes to us reſults naturally from this Relation between Chriſt and the World. The myſterious Work of our Redemption itſelf ſeems to have ariſen from the original Relation between the only Son of God, and Man the Creature of God; and our Chriſtian Faith, in every Article and Branch of it, has a juſt Foundation and Support in the Power, Authority, and Preeminence of the Son of God. We may well believe he has redeemed us, ſince we know he made us. And, though all Nature ſeems to frown on us, and to threaten Death

and Deſtruction, from which no human Power or Cunning can deliver us; yet our Hope is ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, being placed in Him who is *able to ſubdue all Things to himſelf*.

This Belief, That the Dead ſhall hear the Voice of the Son of God, and ariſe to Life, is the fundamental Article of a Chriſtian's Faith: If this be not well eſtabliſhed, our Hope and Confidence are vain, and the preaching the Croſs of Chriſt is Fooliſhneſs.

Let us reflect a little how our Caſe ſtands with reſpect to the Proſpect beyond the Grave; let us conſider what Hopes Nature furniſhes, and how they are ſupported, confirmed, and enlarged, by the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus.

When we view the World in its preſent Circumſtances, and ſee the Miſery and Oppreſſion that are in it; when we conſider that the Diſtreſſes and Sorrows ariſing from the Weakneſs and the Wickedneſs of Men are in Number and in Weight ten times more than all the Sufferings to which we are expoſed by the mere Frailty of our Condition; we can hardly imagine that a wiſe and juſt God made the World to be what we find it is. When we look farther, and find that the beſt Men oftentimes fare worſt;

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that even the Deſire and Endeavour to pleaſe God frequently expoſes them to infinite Sorrows in this World; we ſtand amazed, and are ready to doubt whether theſe Appearances can be reconciled with the Belief that God governs the World. But, ſince all Nature proclaims the Being and the Power of God, and the viſible Things of the Creation declare in every Language of the World the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of Him who made them; under the Force and Conviction of this Evidence that there is a God, we can find no poſſible Way to account for his Juſtice and Goodneſs towards the Children of Men, but by ſuppoſing that *he has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs*: And ſince this World evidently is not the Scene of this Judgment, we conclude there muſt be another in which we ſhall ſtand before his Tribunal. Thus far Nature goes: All beyond this is vain Philoſophy and Imagination, founded in Conceits, which are in vogue to-day, and forgot to-morrow. Scholars may reaſon of the Nature of the Soul, and the Condition of it when ſeparated from the Body; but the common Hopes of Nature receive no Support from ſuch Inquiries. But yet ſomething farther ſeems neceſſary to give Eaſe

to Nature in this painful Search after Life and Happineſs. The numberleſs Inſtances of Mortality which we hear and ſee, the Remains of thoſe who left the World Ages before we came into it, and are ſtill mouldering in their Tombs, is undeniable Evidence that Death deſtroys this compound Being which we call Man. How to revive this Union Nature knows not; and as for thoſe who make the Spirits of Men in the divided State to be perfect Men, they ſeem to have got a Concluſion without conſulting the Premiſes.

Look now into the Goſpel; there you will find every reaſonable Hope of Nature, nay every reaſonable Suſpicion of Nature, cleared up and confirmed, every Difficulty anſwered and removed. Do the preſent Circumſtances of the World lead you to ſuſpect that God could never be Author of ſuch corrupt and wretched Creatures as Men now are? Your Suſpicions are juſt and well-founded: God made Man upright; but thro' the Temptation of the Devil Sin entered, and Death and Deſtruction followed after.

Do you ſuſpect, from the Succeſs of Virtue and Vice in this World, that the Providence of God does not interpoſe to protect the Righteous from Violence, or to puniſh the

the Wicked? The Suſpicion is not without Ground. God leaves his beſt Servants here to be tried oftentimes with Affliction and Sorrow, and permits the Wicked to flouriſh and abound. The Call of the Goſpel is not to Honour and Riches here, but to take up our Croſs and follow Chriſt.

Do you judge, from comparing the preſent State of the World with the natural Notion you have of God, and of his Juſtice and Goodneſs, that there muſt needs be another State in which Juſtice ſhall take place? You reaſon right; and the Goſpel confirms the Judgment. God has appointed a Day to judge the World in Righteouſneſs: Then thoſe who mourn ſhall rejoice, thoſe who weep ſhall laugh, and the perſecuted and afflicted Servants of God ſhall be Heirs of his Kingdom.

Have you ſometimes Miſgivings of Mind? Are you tempted to miſtruſt this Judgment, when you ſee the Difficulties which ſurround it on every Side; ſome which affect the Soul in its ſeparate State, ſome which affect the Body in its State of Corruption and Diſſolution? Look to the Goſpel: There theſe Difficulties are accounted for; and you need no longer puzzle yourſelf with dark Queſtions concerning the State, Condition, and

Nature of ſeparate Spirits, or concerning the Body, however to Appearance loſt and deſtroyed; for the Body and Soul ſhall once more meet to part no more, but to be happy for ever. In this Caſe the Learned cannot doubt, and the Ignorant may be ſure, that 'tis the Man, the very Man himſelf, who ſhall riſe again: For an Union of the ſame Soul and Body is as certainly the Reſtoration of the Man, as the dividing them was the Deſtruction.

Would you know who it is that gives this Aſſurance? 'Tis One who is able to make good his Word; One who loved you ſo well as to die for you; yet One too great to be held a Priſoner in the Grave: No; he roſe with Triumph and Glory, the firſt-born from the Dead, and will in like manner call from the Duſt of the Earth all thoſe who put their Truſt and Confidence in him.

But who is this, you'll ſay, who was ſubject to Death, and yet had Power over Death? How could ſo much Weakneſs and ſo much Strength meet together? That God has the Power of Life, we know; but then he cannot die: That Man is mortal, we know; but then he cannot give Life.

Conſider; does this Difficulty deſerve an Anſwer, or does it not? Our bleſſed Saviour

lived among us in a low and poor Condition, expoſed to much Ill-treatment from his jealous Countrymen: When he fell into their Power, their Rage knew no Bounds: They reviled him, inſulted him, mocked him, ſcourged him, and at laſt nailed him to a Croſs, where by a ſhameful and wretched Death he finiſhed a Life of Sorrow and Affliction. Did we know no more of him than this, upon what Ground could we pretend to hope that he will be able to ſave us from the Power of Death? We might ſay with the Diſciples, *We truſted this had been he who ſhould have ſaved Iſrael*; but he is dead, he is gone, and all our Hopes are buried in his Grave.

If you think this ought to be anſwered, and that the Faith of a Chriſtian cannot be a reaſonable Faith, unleſs it be enabled to account for this ſeeming Contradiction; I beſeech you then never more complain of the Goſpel for furniſhing an Anſwer to this great Objection, for removing this Stumbling-block out of the Way of our Faith. He was a Man, and therefore he died! He was the Son of God, and therefore he roſe from the Dead, and will give Life to all his true Diſciples. He it was who formed this World and all Things in it, and for the ſake of

Man

Man was content to become Man, and to taſte Death for all, that all through him may live. This is a wonderful Piece of Knowledge which God has revealed to us in his Goſpel; but he has not revealed it to raiſe our Wonder, but to confirm and eſtabliſh our Faith in Him to whom he hath committed all Power, *whom he hath appointed Heir of all Things.*

Had the Goſpel required of us to expect from Chriſt the Redemption of our Souls and Bodies, and given us no Reaſon to think that Chriſt was endued with Power equal to the Work, we might juſtly have complained; and it would have been a ſtanding Reproach, That Chriſtians believe they know not what. But to expect Redemption from the Son of God, the Reſurrection of our Bodies from the ſame Hand which at firſt created and formed them, are rational and well-founded Acts of Faith; and it is the Chriſtian's Glory, That he *knows in whom he has believed.*

That the World was made by the Son of God, is a Propoſition with which Reaſon has no Fault to find: That He who made the World ſhould have Power to renew it to Life again, is highly conſonant to Reaſon. All the Myſtery lies in this, That ſo high and

and great a Perſon ſhould condeſcend to become Man, and ſubject to Death, for the ſake of Mankind. But are we the fit Perſons to complain of this tranſcendent myſterious Love? Or, does it become us to quarrel with the Kindneſs of our bleſſed Lord towards us, only becauſe it is greater than we can conceive? No; it becomes us to bleſs and to adore this exceeding Love, by which we are ſaved from Condemnation, by which we expect to be reſcued from Death; knowing that the Power of our bleſſed Lord is equal to his Love, and that he is *able to ſubdue all Things to himſelf.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE III.

PART I.

MATTHEW xi. 6.

Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

IN the Beginning of this Chapter we read, that the Baptiſt ſent two of his Diſciples to Chriſt, to inquire of him whether he was indeed the great Prophet ſo long expected by the People, and foretold by the Prophets, or whether they were ſtill to expect and wait the Coming of another. Our Saviour detained the Diſciples of *John*, till he had made them Eye-witneſſes of the mighty Power that was in him. They ſaw, at

at the Command of his Word, the Blind receive Sight, the Lame walk, the Lepers cleanſed, the Deaf reſtored to Hearing, and the Dead raiſed up to Life again: They ſaw likewiſe, that theſe mighty Powers were exerciſed without giving the leaſt Suſpicion of any worldly Deſign; that no Court was made to the Great or Wealthy by ſingling them out either for Patients or for Diſciples. The Benefit of the Miracles was chiefly the Lot of the Poor; and as they were better diſpoſed to receive the Goſpel, ſo were they prefered before the Rich and Mighty to be the Diſciples of Chriſt. When the Baptiſt's Diſciples had ſeen and heard theſe Things, our Saviour thought them ſufficiently enabled to ſatisfy *John* in the Inquiry upon which he had ſent them: *Go*, ſays he, *and ſhew John thoſe Things which ye do hear and ſee: The Blind receive their Sight, and the Lame walk; the Lepers are cleanſed, and the Deaf hear; the Dead are raiſed up, and the Poor have the Goſpel preached to them.* Then follow immediately the Words of the Text: *And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

The cloſe Connection of the Text with the laſt Words of the fifth Verſe ſhews us what ſort of Perſons our Saviour had in his Eye,

Eye, when he ſpoke of the Offence taken at him in the World: *The Poor*, ſays he; *have the Goſpel preached to them: And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* As if he had ſaid, The Poor are ready to embrace the Goſpel, and happy are in this, yea happier far, notwithſtanding their preſent uncomfortable Condition, than the Honourable and the Learned, who are too great, and in their own Opinion too wiſe, to hearken to the Inſtructions of the Goſpel.

The Words thus explained lead us to inquire,

Firſt, What are the Offences which are generally taken at the Goſpel of Chriſt:

Secondly, From what Source theſe Offences come.

The Poverty and Meanneſs in which our Saviour appeared, was the earlieſt, and may probably be the lateſt, Objection to the Goſpel. He came from God to convert and to ſave the World, to declare the Purpoſes and the Commands of the Almighty, and to exact Obedience from every Creature; but he came with leſs Attendance and Shew than if he had been an ordinary Meſſenger from the Governor of a Province. Hence it is, that we ſo often find him upbraided either with the Meanneſs of his Parentage,

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the Obſcurity of his Country, or the preſent Neceſſity of his Circumſtances: *Is not this the Carpenter's Son?* ſays one; *Can any Good come out of Nazareth?* ſays another; *or any Prophet out of Galilee?* ſays a third. And when they ſaw him oppreſſed with Sufferings, and weighed down with Afflictions, they openly inſulted his Sorrow, and triumphed over his fond Pretences to ſave the World: *Thou*, ſay they, *that deſtroyeſt the Temple, and buildeſt it in three Days, ſave thyſelf: If thou be the Son of God, come down from the Croſs.* And ſo blinded are Men with the Notions of worldly Greatneſs, and ſo apt to conceive of the Majeſty of God according to their own Ideas of Power and Dignity, that this Prejudice has prevailed in every Age. The Apoſtle to the *Corinthians preached Chriſt crucified*; but he was to the *Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Fooliſhneſs*: For the *Jews required a Sign*, a viſible temporal Deliverance, and had no Notion, much leſs any Want, as they could apprehend, of ſuch a Saviour as Jeſus. The *Greeks ſought after Wiſdom*, and thought that, if God were indeed to redeem the World, he would act more ſuitably to his Power and Wiſdom: Whenever they made their *Jupiter* ſpeak, his Voice was Thunder, and Lightning was

his

his Appearance, and he delivered Oracles not to be communicated to vulgar Ears. So in the Old Teſtament, when God ſpeaks, *Clouds and Darkneſs are round about him*, and his Preſence and his Voice are terrible. But here every thing had a different Turn: The Appearance was in the Likeneſs of a Man, and in the Form of a Servant; and, as he came in like a Servant, he went out like a Slave, *he was eſteemed ſtricken, and his Departure was taken for Miſery.* His Doctrine was framed rather to purify the Heart, and to give Wiſdom to the Simple, than to exerciſe the Head, and furniſh Matter for the Curious and Learned; to be a general Inſtruction and a common Rule of Life to all Men, and not to ſatisfy the Vanity of worldly Wiſdom in Inquiries above its Reach. With Him the Precepts of Virtue are the Principles of Wiſdom and Holineſs, the greateſt Ornament of the Mind of Man.

But theſe Things the wiſe and the great Men of the World find hard to reconcile with the Wiſdom and Majeſty of God, according to their Notions of Wiſdom and Power. Why did not Chriſt, ſay they, appear in the Power and Majeſty of his Father? Would not the Embaſſy have been more worthy both of God and of Him? Would

Would any Prince, who had a mind to reclaim his rebellious Subjects to Obedience, not rather chuſe to ſend a Perſon of Honour with a ſuitable Retinue, whoſe Appearance might command Reſpect and Credit, than an Ambaſſador clothed in Rags and Poverty, fit only to create in the Rebels a greater Contempt both of himſelf and his Prince? If it was the Purpoſe of God, that the World through Faith ſhould be ſaved, would not the World more ſecurely and readily have confided in one whoſe very Appearance would have ſpoke his Dignity, than in one who ſeemed to be even more miſerable than themſelves, and not able to reſcue himſelf from the vileſt and moſt contemptible Death?

But let us now, in the ſecond Place, conſider what Foundation there is in Reaſon for this great Prejudice.

It is no Wonder to hear Men reaſon upon the Notions and Ideas which are familiar to them. Great Power and great Authority are connected with the Ideas of great Pomp and Splendor; and, when we talk of the Works of God, our Minds naturally turn themſelves to view the great and miraculous Works of Providence: And this is the Reaſon why Men are ſlow to diſcern the Hand of God in the ordinary Courſe of Nature, where Things,

Things, being familiar to us, do not ſtrike with Wonder and Admiration.

When *Naaman* the *Syrian* came to the Prophet of *Iſrael* to be cured of his Leproſy, *Eliſha* ſent a Meſſenger unto him, ſaying, *Go and waſh in Jordan ſeven Times, and thy Fleſh ſhall come again unto thee, and thou ſhalt be clean.* The haughty *Syrian* diſdained the eaſy Cure, and ſcorned the Prophet: Is this your Man of God, and this his mighty Power to ſend me to a pitiful River of *Iſrael*? *Behold*, ſays he, *I thought he will ſurely come out to me, and ſtand and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and ſtrike his Hand over the Place, and recover the Leper. Are not Abana and Pharphar, Rivers of Damaſcus, better than all the Waters of Iſrael? may I not waſh in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a Rage.* But his Servants, not a little wiſer than their Maſter, thus reaſon the Caſe with him: *My Father, if the Prophet had bid thee do ſome great Thing, wouldſt thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he ſaith unto thee, Waſh and be clean?* Upon this gentle Rebuke his Stomach came down, and he condeſcended to follow the Prophet's Direction; *and his Fleſh came again, like the Fleſh of a young Child, and he was clean.* Not

unlike to *Naaman*'s Folly is theirs, who take offence at the Poverty and Meanneſs of the Author of our Redemption. His Sentiments and theirs agree: He expected to have ſeen ſome ſurprizing Wonder wrought for his Cure; and, when he was bid only to waſh, he thought there could be nothing of God in ſo trifling a Remedy. And is not this their Senſe, who think that ſo obſcure, ſo mean a Perſon as Jeſus could never be the Meſſenger of God upon ſo great an Errand as the Salvation of the World? who thus expoſtulate, Why came he not in a Majeſty ſuitable to his Employment, and then we would have believed him; but how can we expect to be raiſed to the Glory of God by him who was himſelf the Scorn and Contempt of Men?

If we ſearch this Prejudice to the Bottom, we ſhall find that it ariſes from a falſe Conception of the Power and Majeſty of God, as if the Succeſs of his Purpoſes depended upon the viſible Fitneſs of the Inſtruments he made choice of. With Men we know the Caſe is ſo; they muſt uſe Means which they can judge to be adapted to the End they aim at, if they intend to proſper in what they undertake: But with God it is otherwiſe. To ſtop the Current even of the

ſmalleſt

ſmalleſt River, Banks muſt be raiſed, and Sluices cut, when the Work is done by Man: But in the Hand of God the Rod of *Moſes* was more than ſufficient to curb the Rage of the Sea, and force it to yield a Paſſage to his People. *The Fooliſhneſs of God*, ſays the Apoſtle, *is wiſer than Men, and the Weakneſs of God is ſtronger than Men:* Teaching us that we ſhould not preſume to ſit in Judgment upon the Methods of Providence; ſince, how fooliſh or how weak ſoever they may ſeem to us, they will be found in his Hand to be the wiſeſt and the ſtrongeſt. And this Reaſoning the Apoſtle applies to the Caſe now before us: *The Croſs of Chriſt was a Stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks Fooliſhneſs; but unto all them which are called, the Power of God, and the Wiſdom of God; becauſe the Fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than Men, and the Weakneſs of God ſtronger than Men.* However the *Jews*, or however the *Greeks* conceived of the crucified Jeſus, yet to every Believer he is the mighty *Power of God to Salvation*, becauſe God ordained him ſo to be; and this Ordination gives full Efficacy to the Croſs of Chriſt, however in itſelf contemptible, and to all human Appearance unfit for the Purpoſe. The Waters of *Jordan* had no natural Efficacy to cleanſe

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a Leper; in the Rod of *Moſes* there was no Power to divide the Sea: But, when ordained by God to theſe Purpoſes, the Sea fled back at the Touch of *Moſes*'s Rod, and the Leproſy of *Naaman* was purged by the ſo much deſpiſed Waters of *Iſrael*. If we would judge truly, the more ſimple and plain the Methods of Providence are, the more do they ſpeak the Power of the Almighty. When God ſaid, *Let there be Light; and there was Light*, his uncontroulable Power more evidently appeared, than if all the Angels of Heaven had been employed to produce it. When our Lord ſaid, *I will be thou clean*, and the Perſon was cleanſed, his Divinity ſhone forth more brightly, than if he had commanded all the Powers above viſibly to aſſiſt him. So likewiſe, when God committed the Redemption of the World to Jeſus, a Man of Sorrow and Affliction, and of no Form or Comelineſs, and gave him the Power of doing ſuch Works as never Man did, in confirmation of his Commiſſion, he appeared as plainly in him, as if he had clothed him with viſible Majeſty and Power. If we conſider him afflicted and tormented, and given up to a cruel Death, it proves indeed that he was weak and mortal; but ſtill God is ſtrong, and not the leſs able to

eſtabliſh

eſtabliſh the Word which he ſpoke by this weak, this mortal Man.

As to this Part of the Offence then, ſo far as the Majeſty and Power of God are concerned, it proceeds from very wrong Notions in both Caſes, and ſuppoſes that the Majeſty of God wants the ſame little Supports of outward Pomp and Grandeur as that of Men does, and that his Power depends upon the Fitneſs of inſtrumental or material Cauſes, as human Power plainly does; whereas the Majeſty and Power of God are never more clearly ſeen, than when he makes choice of the *weak Things of the World to confound the Things which are mighty*.

Let us then in the next Place conſider, with reſpect to Men, whether the Advantages on their Side would have been greater, had Chriſt appeared in greater Splendor and with more viſible Power and Authority.

How far the Imaginations of ſome Men may rove upon ſuch Inquiries as theſe, or what Degrees of Splendor and Glory they would judge ſufficient for their Purpoſe, I cannot tell. This we are ſure of, That the Majeſty of the Almighty is not to be approached by human Eyes; that therefore, whenever it deſcends to treat with Men, it muſt be veiled and obſcured under ſuch

Repreſentations as Men can bear. This is true, you'll ſay; but is there no Medium between the immediate Preſence of God, and his appearing in the Form of a Servant, and dying, not as the Children of Men commonly die, but as the vileſt and moſt profligate Criminal? Many Degrees there are, no doubt, of viſible Glory, in any of which Chriſt might have appeared, but in none with greater Advantage to Religion than that in which he came. Suppoſe he had come, as the *Jews* expected, in the Form of a mighty Prince, and in that Situation had propagated his Faith and Doctrine; what would the Unbelievers then have ſaid? How often ſhould we have been told before now, that our Religion was the Work of human Policy, and that our Prince's Doctrine and Dominions were extended by the ſame Sword? Was ever any Religion the better thought of for having been preached at the Head of an Army? This is certain, That, to make Religion a rational Act of the Mind, it cannot be conveyed to us in too eaſy and familiar a Manner: The leſs Awe we have of our Teacher, the more Freedom we ſhall exerciſe in weighing and examining his Doctrines. And upon this Account our Saviour's Appearance was in the moſt proper Form,

Form, as it gave to Men the greateſt Scope and Liberty of trying and ſearching into his Doctrines and Pretences: And therefore his Meanneſs and Poverty ſhould leaſt of all be objected by thoſe who ſeem to contend for nothing more than to clear Religion from Fears and Prejudices.

But perhaps they will ſay, We wanted him not to appear in worldly State and Glory, or to exerciſe temporal Dominion on Earth; we would have been contented with a viſible, though an inferior kind of Manifeſtation of his divine Authority. *O Fools, and ſlow of Heart to believe all that the Prophets have written!* What think ye of giving Sight to the Blind; of opening the Ears of the Deaf; of looſening the Tongue that was dumb; of reſtoring Health to the Sick; of raiſing the Dead to Life again; of raiſing even himſelf from the Grave, and aboliſhing the Scandal of the Croſs by a viſible Victory and Triumph over Death? What do ye call theſe Things? What do they manifeſt to you? Are theſe the Works of that mean Man, that wretched, that crucified Mortal, of whom we have been ſpeaking? Do Slaves and Servants, nay, do Princes and the greateſt of the Children of Men, uſe to perform ſuch Works? If not, theſe are the

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very Manifeſtations of divine Power and Authority which you require. Nor can it, I believe, enter into the Heart of Man to contrive any greater Signs to aſk of any Perſon pretending to a divine Commiſſion, than theſe which our Saviour daily and publickly gave the World of his Authority. Had he appeared with all the viſible Power and Glory which you can conceive, yet ſtill you cannot imagine what greater Works than theſe he could poſſibly perform: And therefore the Evidence now, under all the Meanneſs of his Appearance, is the ſame for his divine Authority and Commiſſion, as it would have been, had he come in the greateſt Pomp of Glory and Power.

As to us, I think, who are removed at a Diſtance from the Scene of this Action, the Evidence is much greater. Had he come in ſurprizing Glory, we might have ſuſpected the Relations of Men, who, we might well think, ſaw and heard every thing under the greateſt Aſtoniſhment, and, like St. *Paul* when he was caught up to the third Heavens, could hardly tell whether they were in the Body, or out of the Body. But now we have the Evidence of Men who lived and converſed with him familiarly, who ſaw all his mighty Works, and ſaw them without

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Surprize or Aſtoniſhment, being reconciled to them by daily Uſe, and the long-experienced Gentleneſs and Love of their Maſter; and therefore they very juſtly introduce their Accounts with this Aſſurance, *That they relate that only which they had heard, which they had ſeen with their Eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their Hands had handled, of the Word of Life.* So far are we then from having any juſt Cauſe of Offence in the Poverty and Meanneſs of our bleſſed Lord, that from thoſe Circumſtances ariſes the great Stability of our Faith, and this comfortable Aſſurance, That our Faith ſtandeth not in the Words or in the Works of Man's Wiſdom and Power, but in the Power and in the Wiſdom of the Almighty, who knows how to produce Strength out of Weakneſs.

DISCOURSE III.

PART II.

I Have already examined the firſt and great Prejudice againſt the Goſpel, ariſing from the Poverty and Meanneſs of our bleſſed Lord, and the low Condition of Life in which he appeared in the World, and the wretched Circumſtances which put an end to it; and ſhewed it to be ſo far from being a juſt Offence againſt the Goſpel, that, when fairly conſidered, it ſerves to recommend Religion to us with all poſſible Advantage, and the more eminently to ſet forth the Love of Chriſt, and the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, in the Goſpel.

It was from the Offence taken at the mean Condition of our Lord, that the Croſs

became a *Stumbling-block to the Jews.* It became alſo, as the Apoſtle ſays, *Fooliſhneſs to the Greeks:* For they *ſought after Wiſdom*; and, not finding the Wiſdom they ſought after in the Goſpel, it was eſteemed by them as Fooliſhneſs.

The great Articles upon which all Religion depends, are the Nature of God, the Immortality of the Soul, and the Certainty of future Rewards and Puniſhments in another Life after this. Theſe Things have ever exerciſed the Wit and Learning of the conſidering Part of Mankind, and Philoſophy has furniſhed Difficulties on every Side; and, were they well cleared up, 'tis thought Religion would want no other Support. But in vain do you ſearch the Goſpel of Chriſt for a Solution of theſe Difficulties: He has not ſo much as entered into them, or once attempted to give an Account of the Nature or Eſſence of God, or of an human Soul, or to conſider the Difficulties that are urged by the Schools againſt its ſeparate Exiſtence from the Body. Future Rewards and Puniſhments he has indeed fully aſſerted; but, as to the Nature and Manner of them, and the Soul's Exiſtence in each State, he has left them involved in the ſame Intricacies in which he found them. And yet, ſay the

Diſputers of this World, who would not expect from a Perſon ſent from God to have all his Difficulties ſolved which affect the Belief and Practice of Religion? We are bid to be good and holy, and are promiſed Immortality: So far 'tis well. But did he not know what Doubts exerciſe the moſt learned Men concerning the Nature of God, and of the Soul, and its Paſſage to another World, and concerning the Place and Condition of that other World? Why were not theſe Doubts cleared? Had he opened to us this dark Scene of Nature, and made us to underſtand the Contexture of the Soul, and its Manner of ſubſiſting out of the Body; had he taught us to comprehend the State and Nature of the other World; ſuch Doctrines, ſuch Diſcoveries would have been ſufficient Evidence of the divine Wiſdom: But now we are only taught the plain Doctrines of Morality, and are bid to take his Word for our Immortality.

To clear up this great and unreaſonable Offence againſt the Goſpel, I deſire you would conſider with me the following Particulars:

Firſt, That the Objection does not lie properly againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt; but, if there be any Senſe in it, it muſt riſe higher,

higher, and ſtrike at the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in the Creation: For, if any Fault is to be found in this Matter, it is not with Chriſt for not teaching us more Wiſdom than we are capable of, but with God for not making us wiſer than we are. And hence it will appear, That the Objection is both impious and ſenſeleſs.

Secondly, That this Objection, allowing it its full Force, does no way affect the Belief or Practice of Religion; becauſe Religion depends entirely upon the Certainty of the Soul's Immortality, and of a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments; which Certainty no way depends upon the Knowledge of the Nature of the Things themſelves, ſince we are and may be certain of many Things, the Nature of which we neither do nor can know. And hence it will appear, That the Difficulties ariſing from the Conſideration of the Nature of theſe Things cannot affect our Belief of the Certainty of them, if it be ſupported by proper Evidence; and, conſequently, that Religion is no way concerned to remove theſe Difficulties. And,

Thirdly, That the Goſpel has given us the greateſt Evidence for the Certainty and Reality of theſe Things, that can be thought on or deſired. And hence it will appear,

That

That the Doctrines of the Goſpel are ſuch as are adapted to the Service of Religion, and as might be expected from a Teacher divinely inſpired.

And Firſt, Let it be conſidered, That this Objection does not lie againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt; but, if there be any Force in it, it ſtrikes immediately at the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in the Creation.

As long as Men keep to the plain ſimple Points in which Religion is concerned, there is no Danger of their ſplitting upon theſe inſuperable Difficulties. If they ſeek after God, the whole Creation will lead them to him; *for the inviſible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the Things which are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* If they ſearch after the Immortality of the Soul, and the Certainty of a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, theſe Truths will be ſuggeſted to them from their own natural Senſe of Good and Evil, and the Notions of God's Wiſdom and Juſtice and Goodneſs, compared with the preſent unequal Diſtributions of Rewards and Puniſhments; which can be accounted for upon no other Foot, nor reconciled to the natural Senſe God has implanted

in us of the Difference of Good and Evil, and the Notions we have of his Excellency and Perfection. But, if they launch out into philoſophical Inquiries, and, not content to know that God is, without knowing what he is, endeavour to pry into the Nature and Manner of the Exiſtence of the Almighty; or if, not ſatisfied with the moral Certainty of a future State, they want to look into the Contexture of the Soul, and to ſee there the natural Seeds of Immortality; 'tis no wonder if they make ſhipwreck both of their Reaſon and their Faith at once: For this Knowledge is too high for Men. God has not given us Faculties to enable us to comprehend theſe Myſteries of Nature; and therefore we muſt always of neceſſity wander out of the Way, and be bewildered, when we ſearch after them. For let any Man conſider whence it is that the Difficulty of theſe Inquiries ariſeth: 'Tis not for want of Teaching, for all the Teaching in the World will not enable Men to comprehend the Things of which they can form no Notions or Ideas. And this is the Caſe: The Seeds of this Knowledge are not implanted in our Nature, and therefore no Cultivation can ever produce it. There is nothing which

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ever fell under the Notice of our Senſes, to which the Exiſtence and Being of God can be likened, nothing that bears any Proportion of Similitude to the natural Frame and Make of our Souls: And therefore 'tis impoſſible to repreſent theſe Things to the Mind of Man; for 'tis not in the Power of any Sound of Words to create new Notions or Ideas in our Mind, or to convey new Knowledge without them. God has ſet Bounds to our Knowledge by limiting our Faculties, beyond which our utmoſt Care and Diligence, however aſſiſted, cannot advance. Whatever Wiſdom or Excellency of Knowledge may be in our Teacher, 'tis impoſſible he ſhould infuſe more into us than we are capable of receiving; as a Veſſel can never receive more than its Meaſure, though it be filled out of the Sea.

This being the State and Condition of Men, it had been to little Purpoſe, if our bleſſed Lord had attempted to let them into the Knowledge of thoſe great Secrets of Nature, which the Curious and Learned are ſo deſirous of prying into. His Buſineſs was to inſtruct them in the Ways of Virtue and Holineſs, to awaken their ſleepy Souls and rouze their ſtupid Conſciences to a Senſe of

Goodneſs, to ſhew them the Way to Peace and Happineſs, by ſetting before them the Precepts of God and Nature in their true uncorrupted Purity: And this he has done, even by the Confeſſion of his greateſt Enemies, who in this Part have nothing to object, but that his Laws are too good and too holy for their Obſervance. 'Tis the great Excellency of a Teacher to ſpeak to the Senſe and Underſtanding of the People; and, whenever he riſes above them, he is loſt in the Clouds, and his Words are mere Air and Sound: And therefore, whatever Wiſdom and Knowledge were in our bleſſed Saviour, 'tis Folly to expect from him any greater Degrees of either, than we are capable of comprehending. As he was our Prophet and Teacher, it was his Buſineſs to be underſtood; and he forbore teaching us the deep Myſteries of Nature, for the ſame Reaſon that we do not teach Children Algebra, not that we envy them the Knowledge, but that we know they are incapable of it. Inſtead of improving the Nature of Man, he muſt have deſtroyed it, and new-created him, to have made him capable of a clear Inſight into all the Myſteries which the Curious ſeem deſirous of knowing. And, could

could he have given us all the Knowledge we thirſt after, yet ſtill the Way to Happineſs would be the ſame, and we could do nothing to ſet forward our Salvation, which he has not already both inſtructed and enabled us to do: And therefore, as the Caſe ſtands, he has fully performed the Office of a divine Teacher, having fully inſtructed us *in the Things which make for our Peace.*

If you will preſs this Argument any farther, you muſt plead the Cauſe with God, and not with Chriſt: He has taught you all that you were capable of knowing; and you muſt inquire of God, why he made you no better and no wiſer. And had it not, you'll ſay, been better, if God had given us ſuch enlarged Faculties, as might have enabled us to ſurmount all Difficulties of this kind? If you aſk me, I can readily anſwer, That I had rather I were an Angel than a Man; but I know of no Right I had to be either; and that I am either, is owing purely to the Goodneſs and Beneficence of my Creator. Had he left me ſtill in the Lump of Clay out of which I was formed, he had done me no Injury, nor could any Complaint have been formed againſt him on my behalf. For what I have, I have Reaſon to be thankful;

for what I have not, I have no Reaſon to complain.

Had God indeed given us only the Faculties of Men, and required of us the Service of Angels, we might then with ſome Juſtice have lamented the unequal Weight: But now that he requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform, and what, according to our preſent Degree of Underſtanding, it is highly reaſonable we ſhould perform, it is great Perverſeneſs to hang back for want of more Light, and a greater Capacity to underſtand what it is no way neceſſary for us to underſtand. Our preſent Faculties, if rightly applied, will lead us to a Certainty of the Being of a God, to the Knowledge of his Excellency and Perfection, and will inſtruct us wherein our reaſonable Service to him does conſiſt: And ſhall we, when we know there is an all-ſufficient Being, and that it is our Duty to ſerve him, ſhall we, I ſay, ſuſpend our Duty, becauſe we meet with great Difficulties in trying to comprehend his Nature and Manner of Exiſtence? As weak as we are, we may aſſuredly know, *That God will one Day judge the World in Righteouſneſs, and reward every Man according to his Doings:* And ſhall we not liſten

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to this great Motive to Obedience, becauſe we are not able to know how the Soul can act diſtinctly from the Body, or how it can be united to it again? It would be altogether as reaſonable for a Merchant not to trade to the *Indies*, though he is ſure there is great Wealth and Riches there, till he can account to himſelf for the Nature of all the ſurprizing Objects in that other World; or for a Man not to eat, though he is ſure it would nouriſh and ſupport his Life, till he can ſee the Reaſon of Nutrition, and give an Account of all the ſecret Ways by which Nature performs the Work.

God has given us Knowledge ſufficient to be the Foundation of our Duty; and, if we will uſe the Light we have, we ſhall be happy. The great Miſtake which Men commit in reflecting upon theſe Matters, is, That they ſuppoſe they ſhould have better Evidence for the Things of another World, could they overcome theſe Difficulties, which croſs them perpetually in the Search after Nature: And this would indeed be a real Advantage to Religion, if it were ſo; but that it is not, will appear in the following Conſiderations: For,

Secondly, The Difficulties which ariſe in conſidering the natural Properties of Things,

do no way affect the Certainty and Reality of their Exiſtence: If they did, we could be certain of the real Exiſtence of no one Thing; ſince there is nothing but what affords us very great Difficulties, when we come to account for the Nature and Properties of it. Let what will be the Subject, I think, there cannot be two more different Inquiries, than when we examine whether the Thing really is, and when we examine what it is: They are Inquiries which do not at all depend one upon the other. We can examine the Properties of ſome Things, without ſo much as reflecting whether there ever were ſuch Things, or no. When the Mathematician conſiders the Properties of an exact Circle or Square, it matters him not whether there be ſuch perfect Figures in the World, or no; nor does he trouble himſelf to inquire. So, on the other hand, we can examine and come to the Certainty of the Exiſtence of Things, without knowing, or attempting to know, their Natures and Properties. The Peaſant knows there is a Sun and a Moon, as well as the Aſtronomers; and his Certainty, as to their Exiſtence, is as great and as well-grounded as theirs. Nor is this only true in Things which are Objects

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of Senſe, but will hold likewiſe with reſpect to ſuch Things, the Exiſtence of which we collect from Reaſon. From viſible Effects to inviſible Cauſes the Argument is concluſive; though in many Caſes it extends only to the Reality of the Cauſe, and does not in the leaſt lead us to the Knowledge of the Nature of it. When we ſee Diſtempers cured by the Uſe of Plants or of Drugs, ſome Virtue we are ſure there is in them, upon which the Effect depends, though what we ſeldom or never can tell. This being the Caſe then, That we can arrive at the Knowledge of the Exiſtence of Things, when we are perfectly ignorant of their Natures and Properties; and can, on the other ſide, examine and know the Properties of Things, without conſidering whether they exiſt, or no; 'tis plain that theſe are diſtinct Acts of Knowledge, which do not depend on each other, and that we may be certain as to the Reality of Things, however we may be puzzled and confounded when we enter into the Conſideration of their Nature.

And now pray conſider, as to the Caſe before us, what ſort of Knowledge it is that is neceſſary to ſupport Religion in the World. If we are ſure there is a God who will judge the

the World, is not that a ſufficient Foundation for Holineſs? Does it ſignify any thing, as to the Neceſſity of our Obedience, to inquire into the Manner or Nature of his Being? Does not the whole of Religion evidently depend on this Queſtion, Whether there certainly be a God who will judge the World? And, if it appears there is, is it of any Conſequence to ſay there are great Difficulties in conceiving how theſe Things can be? For, if they certainly will be, they will be ſome Way or other, no doubt; and it concerns not us to know which Way. Since therefore our Saviour has given the greateſt Evidence that can be of the Certainty of a future State, and the Soul's Exiſtence after Death, 'tis impertinent and unphiloſophical to confront this Evidence with Difficulties ariſing from our Conceptions as to the Nature and Manner of theſe Things: It is in truth to ſet up Ignorance againſt Knowledge; for our Difficulties ſpring from our Ignorance of Nature, which is an Argument we ought rather to be aſhamed of, than to bring into Competition with the clear Evidence we have for the Certainty and Reality of the Things themſelves. Were this duly conſidered, it would ſet the great Controverſy

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of Religion upon the right Foot, which ought to turn on this ſingle Point, Whether there be ſufficient Evidence of a future State, or no? For, if ſuch a State there be, let our Conceptions concerning it be clear, or not clear, moſt certainly we ſhall be brought to account for all we do; which is enough, I think, to make us careful what we do. And this is the main Concern of Religion, and that which will ſecure whatever is neceſſary to it.

Since then Religion evidently depends upon the Certainty and Reality of a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, and other the like Articles, and not in the leaſt upon the Knowledge of the Nature, or the philoſophical Account of theſe Things; it had been abſurd in our Saviour, who was a Preacher of Religion only, a Teacher ſent from God, to have entered into thoſe Difficulties, which did not at all belong to his Province. And, ſince neither the Practice of Religion would have received any Advantage by the Diſcuſſion of theſe Doubts, for, if we had the Knowledge of Angels, and ſaw the Heavens as plainly as they do, yet the ſame Virtue and Holineſs, without any Change, would be neceſſary to carry us thither;

thither; nor the Motives of Religion would have gained any new Strength, ſince the Evidence for the Reality of a future State is not affected by theſe Doubts; it is ridiculous to expect the Solution of them in the Goſpel, when, if ſolved, they would not ſerve any one Point in which the Goſpel is concerned, but would end in mere Philoſophy and Speculation.

But perhaps it may be ſaid, That all this is true indeed, where the Exiſtence of Things is out of doubt: In that Caſe no Difficulties can deſtroy the Evidence of their Exiſtence. But, where the Exiſtence of Things is doubtful, there the ſeeming Contradictions which ariſe in conſidering the Natnre of the Things, do mightily ſhake the Preſumption of their Exiſtence. This is a fair State of the Caſe, and we ought to join Iſſue on it.

Let us then proceed, in the third Place, to ſhew, That the Goſpel has given us the greateſt Evidence of our own Immortality, and of a future State, that can be thought on or deſired. There are two Things upon which our Reſurrection to Life depends, as we learn from our Saviour's Anſwer to the *Sadducees*: *Ye do err*, ſays he, *not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God*: Which

Anſwer is a very clear one; for we can deſire no more than to know that God certainly can raiſe us, and that he certainly will. The firſt is to be learnt from our natural Notions of God; the ſecond from the Scripture, which is the Declaration of his Will to Mankind. As to the Power of God, it cannot be brought into queſtion, without throwing off all Pretence even to natural Religion: For, if you allow God, that he made the World, and formed Man into a living Soul in the Beginning; you cannot deny but that He who made Man out of nothing at firſt, can as eaſily make him again, after Death has diſſolved the vital Union. It remains then to inquire after the Will of God, Whether He, who certainly can, certainly will raiſe us at the laſt Day? The Time will not permit me to enter largely into the Argument; and therefore I ſhall reſt it upon one, but that a very clear Point. It will not be denied but that we have our Saviour's Promiſe and Word for our Reſurrection often repeated in the Goſpel: And conſider, pray, did not he raiſe many dead to Life again? Did he not at laſt raiſe himſelf from the Grave, after he had been three Days buried?

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Is it not plain then, upon the Goſpel Account, that he had the Power of raiſing the Dead? and is it not as plain, that he has promiſed to raiſe us? Take both Propoſitions together then, and they will amount to this; That He, who has the Power of raiſing the Dead, has promiſed and declared that he will raiſe us from the Dead. God, we know, cannot lye, and therefore muſt ratify every Word which *he ſpoke by his holy Child Jeſus:* And hence ariſes a Security which no Doubts can ſhake. Beſides, as to Difficulties in Nature and Philoſophy, he has not indeed taught us to anſwer them; but he fully anſwered them himſelf, when he came from the Grave; as he who got up and walked, baffled all the Philoſophers' Arguments againſt Motion.

'Tis true, you'll ſay, this is very good Evidence, but you find it hard to believe: And perhaps you might have been as hard of Belief, if our Saviour had reaſoned never ſo philoſophically. The Queſtion is, Whether any Objection lies againſt the Goſpel for overlooking the Difficulties which learned Men raiſe? I have ſhewed that none can lie, and that the Goſpel has given a much better Evidence than that which is deſired:

And

And this is ſufficient to remove the Offence taken upon the Account of this ſuppoſed Defect in the Goſpel. If you believe not the Goſpel, that alters not the Caſe: The Evidence is not the worſe for that; for neither would you believe perhaps, *though one roſe from the Dead.*

DISCOURSE III.

PART III.

THE Prejudices which Men are apt to conceive againſt the Goſpel, are of different Kinds, according to the different Views under which they conſider it. When they ſet themſelves to examine the Pretences it has to be a divine Revelation, they ſtumble at the Meanneſs and Poverty of its Author; imagining that, if God were to ſend a Perſon into the World upon ſo conſiderable an Errand, he would clothe him with a Majeſty becoming one immediately commiſſioned by himſelf, and which might better ſupport the great Undertaking: Or, if they conſider the Goſpel as the Word of God, given to Men for their Inſtruction in

all Things pertaining to the Service of God, they expect to find all their Doubts and Difficulties removed, which are any way related to the Cauſe of Religion; ſuch, for Inſtance, as relate to the Nature of the Soul, its Manner of ſubſiſting out of the Body, and to the Nature and Condition of the future State which we are bid to expect: And, not finding theſe Difficulties conſidered and removed, they are apt to conclude that this Revelation has not all the Marks of Wiſdom which are to be expected in one coming immediately from God.

Theſe Offences have been already conſidered: But, as ſome are offended at the Goſpel for not clearing the Doubts and Difficulties which encumbered the Notions of Religion before, ſo others take offence at the new Doctrines introduced into Religion by the Goſpel, and complain of the Hardſhip put upon them in requiring them to believe Things which are not ſuggeſted to them by natural Reaſon, nor are to be maintained by it. Even of our Saviour's Diſciples we find many offended at his Doctrine, and complaining to each other, *This is an hard Saying; who can hear it?* And ſo far did their Prejudice prevail, *that they went back, and walked no more with him.*

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The Goſpel, it is ſaid, contains many myſterious Truths: And what Purpoſe of Religion can be ſerved by our receiving Articles of Faith which we do not underſtand? Shall we be the better Men for it? Will it make us more juſt or holy, or beneficent to our Brethren? Will it promote the Honour of God to repreſent him as requiring ſuch Conditions from us, the End or Uſe of which we cannot diſcern? Or, will it recommend Religion to the World? Will Men be the more forward to ſubmit, when they muſt firſt renounce their Senſe and Underſtanding, and ceaſe to be rational, in order to be religious?

This is a very heavy Charge, and, were it as true as it is heavy, might poſſibly ſhake the Foundations of the Goſpel. But, to ſet this Matter in a clear Light, I muſt deſire you to obſerve the different Notions which belong to the Word Myſtery in the Uſe of the Goſpel, and in vulgar Uſe among Men at this Time: And, by thus diſtinguiſhing the Uſe or Senſe of the Word, it will appear,

Firſt, That the Objection does not reach the Goſpel Senſe or Uſe of the Word, nor can affect the Myſteries contained in the Goſpel: And,

Secondly, That the Uſe and Senſe of the Word which is liable to this Objection, does not any way belong to the Goſpel; nor are there are any ſuch Myſteries in the Goſpel as may juſtify the Complaint made againſt them.

Firſt then, If you look into the ſacred Writers, you will find, That the whole Deſign of the Goſpel, the Diſpenſation of Providence in the Salvation of Mankind, is ſtyled a Myſtery; *the hidden Wiſdom of God, which was kept ſecret ſince the World began:* A Myſtery 'tis called, becauſe it was kept ſecret ſince the World began, God not having opened or declared his gracious Purpoſes before the Coming of Chriſt. With reſpect to this Time of Secrecy and Silence the Goſpel is called a Myſtery; but, upon the Revelation of it by Chriſt Jeſus, it is no longer looked upon as a Myſtery, but as the Manifeſtation of God's Will and Goodneſs to Men. Thus you will find St. *Paul* ſpeaking in the laſt of the *Romans*: *The Myſtery which was kept ſecret ſince the World began, but now is made manifeſt, and by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the Commandment of the everlaſting God, made known to all Nations for the Obedience of Faith:* That is, This great Work was a

Myſtery

Myſtery in all Ages, being kept ſecret in the Counſels of God; but, ſince the Coming of Chriſt, 'tis no longer a Myſtery, but is manifeſt and made known to all Nations and People. Here then, you ſee plainly, the Oppoſition is between Myſtery and Revelation: What God has reſerved to himſelf, without communicating the Knowledge of it to the World, that is a Myſtery; what he has revealed, is no longer a Myſtery, but a Manifeſtation of his Will and Purpoſe. In this Senſe, I preſume, there lies no Objection againſt the Goſpel: That it was once hidden in the ſecret Counſels of Providence, but is now, by the Revelation of Chriſt Jeſus, made known to all Men, can afford us no Matter of Complaint, but may adminiſter to us great Joy, and be a Subject of Praiſe and Glory to God; inaſmuch as our Eyes have ſeen, and our Ears heard, thoſe Things, which many righteous Men and Prophets have *deſired to ſee, and have not ſeen them, and to hear, and have not heard them.*

As the Goſpel itſelf is in this Senſe ſtyled a Myſtery, ſo are the ſeveral Parts of it likewiſe: *I ſhew you a Myſtery*, ſays St. *Paul; we ſhall not all ſleep, but we ſhall all be changed.* He did not mean that he would ſhew them what they could not comprehend,

but that he would declare to them the Purpoſe of God, which they were ignorant of. The ſame Uſe of the Word you may meet with in our bleſſed Saviour himſelf: When he had deſcribed the future State of the Church in Parables to the *Jews*, and came afterwards to explain them to the Diſciples, he tells them the Reaſon of his Proceeding: *Becauſe*, ſays he, *unto you it is given to know the Myſteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but unto them it is not given.* All Futurities, becauſe known only to God, are Myſteries; but, when revealed, they are no longer ſo, being made known and manifeſt. Thus, 'tis plain, St. *Paul* uſes the Word in 1 *Cor.* xiii. where he joins the Gift of Prophecy and the Knowledge of Myſteries together: *Though I have*, ſays he, *the Gift of Prophecy, and underſtand all Myſteries and all Knowledge:* Where 'tis plain what he means by Myſteries, ſince they are to be underſtood by the Gift of Prophecy. In the fourth Chapter of the ſame Epiſtle he ſhews what Account we are to make of our Paſtors and Teachers: *Let a Man*, ſays he, *ſo account of us, as of the Miniſters of Chriſt, and Stewards of the Myſteries of God.* His Meaning is not, that they were Preachers of Myſteries in the vulgar Notion of it, that is, of Things which no-body

no-body can underſtand; but that God had entruſted them with his Purpoſes and Intentions in the Salvation of Mankind, which they, like good Stewards, were to diſpenſe to the whole Family, by declaring and revealing the whole Will of God.

The ſame Apoſtle ſays, Chap. ii. 7. *We ſpeak the Wiſdom of God in a Myſtery*; and in the next Words explains what he means by Myſtery, *even the hidden Wiſdom which God ordained before the World to our Glory*: And in the tenth Verſe he tells us, this is no longer hidden, but the Myſtery is laid open; *God having revealed it unto us by his Spirit*. In the ſame Senſe we read of the *Myſtery of Faith*: Where we are not to underſtand the Apoſtle to mean incomprehenſible Articles of Faith, but the Revelations of God's Purpoſes and Deſigns, which through Faith we receive, and are therefore ſtyled the Myſteries of Faith.

In this Senſe the Goſpel is full of Myſteries, as containing the ſecret Purpoſes of God's hidden Wiſdom in the Redemption of the World, which were made manifeſt by Chriſt Jeſus, *who brought Life and Immortality to Light*. Againſt this Goſpel Senſe of Myſtery the common Objections have no Force; ſince Myſteries here are not underſtood to be ſuch

Things as Reaſon cannot receive, but ſuch Things as proceed from the hidden Wiſdom of God; and are made manifeſt in the Goſpel of Chriſt.

Let us then, in the ſecond Place, proceed to ſhew, That the Notion of Myſteries, againſt which the Objection lies, does not belong to the Goſpel. The Objection repreſents a Myſtery as a Thing inconceivable, and altogether irreconcileable to human Reaſon. But ſuch Myſteries there are none in the Goſpel of Chriſt. If Men, learned or unlearned, have run themſelves into Contradictions by endeavouring to explain the Myſteries of God farther than he has explained them, be that to themſelves: Let not the Goſpel be charged with their Errors and Miſtakes. Nothing indeed has proved more fatal to Religion, than the vain Attempts of Men to dive into the unrevealed Myſteries of God, and to account for, upon Principles of human Reaſon, the Things which proceed from the hidden Wiſdom of God. All the ſecret Purpoſes of Providence are, in the Senſe of the Scripture, Myſteries; as likewiſe all Knowledge which God has not revealed. Of ſuch Myſteries are there many: But then they concern not us to inquire after; if they did, God would reveal them

them to us. God has declared to us, That he has an only-begotten Son, and that he was the Perſon who came down from Heaven for our Deliverance: That he has an holy Spirit, who ſhall ſanctify our Hearts, and be aſſiſting to us in working out our Salvation. This, and agreeable to this, is the Scripture Doctrine: And a Man would be put to it to fix any Abſurdity, or ſo much as ſeeming Contradiction, upon this Doctrine, or any thing ſaid concerning it in Scripture. Concerning theſe Perſons there are indeed exceeding great Myſteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us, or enabled us to conceive, how his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or how they came from him. Theſe therefore are properly Myſteries, which are hidden in the ſecret Wiſdom of God, and which we are no-where called upon to inquire after. It is eaſy, I think, to take God's Word, that he has a Son and a Spirit, who dwell with him and in him from all Eternity; a Son who came to our Aſſiſtance, a Spirit who is ever with us to guide us into Truth: Theſe Things, I ſay, are eaſy to be believed, without entering into the Difficulties ariſing from natural and philoſophical Inquiries, which the Scripture nowhere encourages us to ſeek after: And, as

long

long as Men keep cloſe to the Rule and Doctrine of Scripture, they will find no Cauſe to enter into the great Complaints raiſed againſt Myſteries. The Scripture has revealed indeed wonderful Things to us, and for the Truth of them has given us wonderful Evidence; ſo that they are well qualified to be the Objects of our Faith: For ſuch God deſigned them, and not for the Exerciſe of our Vanity and Curioſity, or, as you call it, of our Reaſon. If it is not reaſonable to believe God upon the Goſpel Evidence, there is an End of all Myſteries; but, if it is reaſonable, there muſt be an End of all farther Inquiries: And I think common Senſe will teach us not to call God to Account, or pretend to enter into the Reaſon of his Doings.

DISCOURSE IV.

PART I.

1 Cor. i. 21.

For, after that, in the Wiſdom of God, the World by Wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching to ſave them that believe.

IN *the Wiſdom of God, the World by Wiſdom knew not God.* There is ſome Difficulty in aſcertaining the preciſe Meaning of the firſt Words; *In the Wiſdom of God.* Some underſtand the Meaning to be, That, ſince the World, *in the Wiſdom of God*, i. e. by contemplating the Wiſdom of God in the great Works of the Creation, had not *by Wiſdom*, i. e. by the Exerciſe of their Reaſon, arrived

to the true Knowledge of God, it pleaſed God to take another Method, and *by the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching to ſave them that believe.* But, ſince this Difficulty does not affect the main Aſſertions of the Apoſtle in the Text, I will not ſpend Time in inquiring what has been, or may be, ſaid upon this Point.

The main Aſſertions of the Apoſtle in the Text are two:

Firſt, That the World by Wiſdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleaſed God by the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching to ſave Believers.

The Language made uſe of here by St. *Paul* may want explaining; for it may ſeem ſtrange, that the Preaching of the Goſpel ſhould by an Apoſtle of Chriſt be called *the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching.* But the Meaning and Language of St. *Paul* will be accounted for by conſidering what led him to this kind of Expreſſion.

The Doctrine of the Croſs, and of the Redemption of the World by the Death and Paſſion of Chriſt, was received by the great Pretenders to Wiſdom and Reaſon with Scorn and Contempt: *The Greeks,* ſays the Apoſtle, *ſeek after Wiſdom — and Chriſt crucified is to the Greeks Fooliſhneſs.* The Pride of Learning and Philoſophy had ſo poſſeſſed the polite

Parts of the Heathen World, that they could not ſubmit to a Method of Salvation which was above the Reach of their Philoſophy, and which refuſed to be tried by the Diſputes and Subtilties of their Schools. The Apoſtle, Ver. 17, ſays, *Chriſt ſent him to preach the Goſpel, not with the Wiſdom of Words.* The Wiſdom of the World, thus diſcarded, took its Revenge of the Goſpel, and called it *the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching.* Be it ſo, ſays the Apoſtle; yet by this *Fooliſhneſs* of Preaching God intends to ſave them who believe: For this Method is of God, and not of Man; *and the Fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than Men.* You ſee what led St. *Paul* to uſe this Expreſſion, and to call the Preaching of the Goſpel the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching. The Great and the Learned ſo eſteemed it, and ſo called it: The Apoſtle ſpeaks to them in their own Language, and calls upon them in the Text to compare their much-boaſted Wiſdom with this Fooliſhneſs of Preaching, and to judge of them by their Effects: The World by *Wiſdom knew not God*; but the *Fooliſhneſs* of Preaching is *Salvation* to every Believer.

Whether this Charge of Ignorance imputed to the Gentile World be true, or no, is a Matter depending on the Evidence of Hiſtory;

Hiſtory: If it be not true, there can be no Difficulty in diſproving it: The Time and Place may be named, when and where the true Knowledge of God prevailed, and Religion in its Purity was profeſſed by the People. But this has not been attempted, nor will it be, by any one who is acquainted with the Hiſtory of the antient World.

It may be hard perhaps to account for the general Corruption of Religion which prevailed in the World; eſpecially when we conſider how abſolutely abſurd, and contrary to common Senſe, many of the ſuperſtitious Rites were, which had ſpread themſelves over the Heathen World. We can ſcarcely conceive what ſhould move Men to conſecrate Birds and Beaſts, Stocks and Stones, and to fall down and worſhip them. But, theſe Follies being once introduced, and propagated from Father to Son, it is eaſy to account for the great Difficulty of removing them. Cuſtom and Education, and the Reverence which Men naturally have for what they eſteem to be Religion, were Foundations too ſtrong to be removed by the Reaſoning and Speculations of a few who were ſomething wiſer than the reſt, and ſaw perhaps many and great Abſurdities in the common Practice: And, though there did appear in the

the Heathen World ſome ſuch great and good Men, who were as Lights ſhining in a dark Place; yet was there not one found able to extricate himſelf from all the Superſtition of his Country, much leſs to reduce the People to a Practice conſonant to the pure Principles of natural Religion. And it is an Obſervation true in itſelf, and of great Weight in this Caſe, That not one Country, nay not one City, ever embraced the Principles of pure natural Religion upon the Strength of their own Reaſon, or upon Conviction from the Reaſon and Wiſdom of others. And, ſince the World continued under Idolatry for many Ages together before the Coming of Chriſt, notwithſtanding that they had as much Senſe and Reaſon in thoſe Days as we have in ours, what Pretence is there to imagine that they would not have continued in the ſame State to this Day, if the Light of the Goſpel had not appeared?

Whoever conſiders this Matter ſeriouſly and fairly, cannot but be convinced of the Truth of the Apoſtle's Aſſertion, That *by Wiſdom the World knew not God.*

As to the ſecond Propoſition, *That it hath pleaſed God by the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching to ſave them that believe*; as far as true Notions of God and Religion are neceſſary Means

of

of Salvation, the Truth of the Aſſertion will be admitted.

The Enemies of Revelation will of themſelves, and in ſpight of themſelves, bear witneſs ſo far to this Truth. They now ſee clearly the great Truths of Religion; they can now demonſtrate the Being and Attributes of God, and from the Relation we bear to him deduce the Duties owing to him, the Worſhip, and the Purity of the Worſhip, that is to be paid him. Are they wiſer than all who lived before them? or do they owe this new Degree of Light and Knowledge to ſome Advantage which others before them had not? They will hardly ſay they are wiſer than all who lived when Learning and Arts and Sciences flouriſhed in the *Eaſt*, in *Greece*, and at *Rome*; and, ſhould they ſay it, it will be harder ſtill to believe them: And yet what one Advantage have they above the others, this only excepted, That in their Days the Light of the Goſpel has been ſpread over the World?

But, however, this Compariſon between the Wiſe and Learned of different Ages will not determine the Caſe before us; for Religion is not made for Scholars only: The Uſe of it is to govern and direct the World, and to influence the Practice of Mankind.

And

And the great Queſtion lies between the Religion of the World in general before the Coming of Chriſt, and ſince; and the Influence which Religion in one State and the other naturally had, or may be ſuppoſed to have had, by juſt Conſequence, on the Morality of Mankind. To give you an Account of the Religion and Divinity of the Vulgar in the Days of Heatheniſm, would be to entertain you with an Hiſtory of Folly and Superſtition; ſome Parts of which for the Barbarity of them, and ſome for the Lewdneſs of them, are very unfit to be related in a Chriſtian Congregation. The People thought of their Gods much after the rate that the Poets write of them; and their ſacred Hiſtory was an Account of the Battles and Quarrels, and of the Loves and Amours of their Deities. Their Practice in Religion was agreeable to their Articles of Belief: Their impure Deities were worſhiped in Acts of Impurity or Barbarity: And how could it be otherwiſe? for, when Vice itſelf was conſecrated, and had Temples dedicated to it, how could the Worſhipers be untainted?

But conſider now how the Caſe ſtands in Countries where the Goſpel is preached in any tolerable Degree of Purity. The com-

mon People now are no greater Reaſoners than they were formerly: Yet go into our Villages, you will find there a firm Perſuaſion of the Unity of God, who made Heaven and Earth, and all Things in them: The meaneſt of the People will tell you, that an honeſt Heart is the only acceptable Sacrifice to God, and that there is no Way to pleaſe him but by doing juſtly and righteouſly.

Let me aſk now, whence comes this Change? Is it for the better, or no? If it is, ſurely the World is greatly indebted to the Hand that wrought this Change, that rooted out all the falſe Notions deſtructive of Virtue and the Happineſs of Mankind, and planted in the room thereof Principles which do ſo much Honour and Glory to God, and are full of preſent Peace and future Hopes for the Children of Men.

I am aware that it will be ſaid, That the common People now are no more able to give a Reaſon of the Faith that is in them, than their Heatheniſh Anceſtors were before them; and that Cuſtom and the Prejudices of Education have influenced both equally; and that theſe Chriſtians, had they been born Heathens, would have been Heathens, or,

if

if Mahometans, they would have been ſtill Mahometans.

Suppoſe the Caſe to be ſo, and conſider whether we are not extremely obliged to Revelation even upon this Foot.

If Men are naturally influenced by Cuſtom and the Force of Education to follow the Opinions and Practices of their Country, and are, after all that has been ſaid to exalt human Reaſon, incapable to deliver themſelves from popular and national Errors by the Strength of their own Reaſon; two Things muſt, I think, be admitted:

Firſt, That it was a great Undertaking, and the Work of a very extraordinary Power, to root out antient Errors, which had for many Ages had Poſſeſſion of the whole World: And,

Secondly, That it was an Act of great Wiſdom and Goodneſs, as well as Power, to introduce juſt Principles and Notions of Religion, and, by giving them at firſt a firm Eſtabliſhment, to throw the Weight of Cuſtom and Education on the Side of Virtue and true Religion, in oppoſition to Superſtition and Vice.

The firſt Propoſition cannot be diſputed; for, if the Power of Cuſtom and Education be as great as it is repreſented, the Power

muſt be very great that gets the better of it: And I believe it will be hard to ſhew from Hiſtory, that ever a Nation was reaſoned out of their religious Errors: It has been done by the Power of Miracles, and by the Power of the Sword; but in this laſt Method the Nation and its Errors have been commonly deſtroyed together. However, the Goſpel was not introduced by external Force; and therefore the Work muſt neceſſarily be aſcribed to a Power of another kind.

As to the ſecond Propoſition, it may be thought diſhonourable to true Religion to ſuppoſe it to be at all beholden to Cuſtom and Education for its Support; diſhonourable to God, to ſuppoſe that he can make uſe of any thing to propagate Religion, but the Reaſon and Underſtanding of his Creatures; and, conſequently, that true Religion is no longer Religion, when it ſtands by the Force of Cuſtom and Education.

I know how much has been ſaid of the Uſe of Reaſon in Religion, to the Excluſion of all other Helps: But I know too that the holy Writers frequently call on us, *to train up a Child in the Way he ſhould go*, and give this Reaſon for it, *That when he is old he will not depart from it*: I know too that God called *Abraham*, and made of him a

great Nation, *becauſe he knew him, that he would teach his Children after him to keep the Commandments of the Lord:* Which Precept to inſtruct Children betimes, and which Declaration on God's Part in relation to *Abraham*, cannot ſtand with a Suppoſition that true Religion is the worſe for the Support it has from Example and Education.

But to conſider this Matter a little farther: If we know any thing with Certainty of Mankind, it is this; That their Principles, Opinions, and Practices are ſtrongly influenced by Cuſtom and Education. I will aſk any Man, whether he thinks it poſſible to alter this State of Things, and to make all Men as much Philoſophers, and as much above Prejudices, as ſome pretend to be? I believe no Man in his Senſes ever thought this poſſible. If then Men are, and ever will be as long as they continue Men, greatly governed by Cuſtom and Education, the ſingle Queſtion is, Whether it was an Act beneficent to Mankind, and becoming the Wiſdom of God, to direct this Influence to the Side of Virtue and true Religion in order to make Men happy, rather than to leave them to be miſerable under the ſtrong Influence to Vice, Superſtition, and Idolatry, which had Poſſeſſion of the World?

The true End of Religion is to make Men better, to lead them to a due Diſcharge of their Duty to God and to Man. True Principles and right and juſt Notions of God will lead Men to a juſt Performance of their Duty, independently of this Conſideration, Whether their Principles are the Reſult of their own Reaſoning, or inſtilled into them by Education. If this be ſo, the common People, whoſe Religion is always treated as their Prejudices, are as capable of performing the Duties of Religion, and as acceptably in the Sight of God, as the greateſt Reaſoners and Philoſophers.

Let us ſuppoſe, That ſome wiſe Man had fully convinced himſelf by Reaſon of the Being of God, of the Holineſs of his Nature, and that he is a Rewarder of all thoſe who diligently ſeek him: Suppoſe too, That a plain Countryman, not able to make Deductions in a Courſe of Reaſoning, was yet fully perſuaded of the ſame Truths from his Bible, or the Inſtruction of his Pariſh-Prieſt: I ſay, in this Caſe, That the Countryman's Principles are as good a Foundation for all the Duties and Purpoſes of Religion as the Philoſopher's; that they will be as beneficial to the World in making a good Father, Huſband, or Maſter, and as beneficial to the Man

Man in making him happy here and hereafter: And, though his Inſtruction, compared with the Philoſopher's deep Knowledge, may, in the Language of St. *Paul*, be called the *Fooliſhneſs of Preaching*, yet will it, if duly attended to, *make him wiſe unto Salvation.*

I am not placing Religion upon Prejudice as its proper Foundation: No; the Goſpel was at firſt introduced by the ſtrongeſt Appeal to Reaſon, when it was introduced by the Hand of God in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works, which the Apoſtle calls the *Demonſtration of the Spirit*, and oppoſes it to the *Wiſdom of the World:* And the Goſpel ſtands upon the ſame Reaſon ſtill. But this is a Reaſon which, the wiſe ones of the World think, can produce nothing but Prejudice, or ſuch Faith as differs but little from it. This then I ſay, That it was worthy of God, by a ſtrong Hand and outſtretched Arm, in Signs and Wonders to beat down Superſtition and Idolatry, and the corrupt Notions of the World; and to plant in the room of them, not by the Arts of Man's Wiſdom, but by theſe Demonſtrations of the Spirit, true Principles of Reaſon and Religion; to give them Poſſeſſion in the World, that they might be delivered down from

Generation to Generation, and maintained under the natural Influence which Cuſtom and Education have, and always will have, upon Mankind.

And, if we conſider Revelation in this Light only, as removing falſe Principles of Error and Superſtition, and introducing juſt ones of Truth and Religion, independently of the Reaſon and Evidence on which the Goſpel ſtands; it muſt appear to be an Act of divine Love and Goodneſs, which we ought to receive with Thankfulneſs. If Men were ſuppoſed to be quite incapable of entering at all into the Reaſon of Things, and to be wholly guided by Prejudice and Cuſtom, yet ſurely even then it would be an Act of Love to draw out of their Minds Principles full of Miſchief to themſelves and others, and place in their room Principles of Love and Benevolence to make themſelves and others happy. And ſurely this at leaſt muſt be allowed to the Goſpel, That it did in fact expel the falſe and pernicious Notions of Heatheniſm, and introduce Principles upon which Men may be at Peace and in Friendſhip with God and with each other. And from hence perhaps we may ſee the Reaſon why Miracles were ſo frequent in the Beginning of the Goſpel, and why they

ceaſed

ceaſed afterwards. They were neceſſary till Truth had Poſſeſſion of the World; but Truth, throughly eſtabliſhed, was left to be propagated by the natural Means of Inſtruction and Education.

Every body ſees what Miſchief and Wickedneſs are often produced by falſe and corrupt Opinions and Principles; which owe not their Strength to Reaſon, for with Reaſon they have no Alliance, but to the Poſſeſſion they have of the Mind. Good Principles, with the ſame Advantage of Poſſeſſion, will be as powerful to good Purpoſes, though the Mind diſcerns not the Reaſon from whence they flow. There are but few Workmen, perhaps, who know the Reaſon, and can demonſtrate the mechanic Powers of the Inſtruments they uſe; but, being perfect in the Uſe and Application of theſe Powers, they are able Workmen and Maſter-builders; which is all that is required of them. In like manner, if true Religion is ſo introduced into the Mind, as to work in the Heart of Man, and make him upright and honeſt, the End and Purpoſe of Religion is anſwered.

To anſwer this End of Religion were the Preachers of the Goſpel ſent into the World: The Errand was worthy of Him who ſent them; whoſe Goodneſs and Mercy inclined him

him to teach Men the Way to Happineſs, but not to flatter their Vanity and Pride of Knowledge. The Doctrines of the Goſpel are not the worſe for being *Fooliſhneſs to the Greeks, and a Stumbling-block to the Jews*; ſince they are, and on Experience appear to be, *the Power of God to Salvation to all who believe.*

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

IN treating on this Subject, I have already obſerved to you, that there are two Propoſitions or Aſſertions contained in the Words of the Text:

Firſt, That the World by Wiſdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleaſed God by the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching to ſave Believers.

It being allowed in general, that the World was groſly ignorant and ſuperſtitious, and unacquainted with the true Notion of God, and the Religion that was to be paid him; yet it will ſtill be ſaid, that there were ſome, ſome few at leaſt, who had extricated themſelves from theſe popular Errors; who

ſaw

ſaw and acknowledged one ſupreme Being, the Cauſe of all Things; who had clear and diſtinct Notions of Morality, and of the Duties owing from Man to Man. The Writings of ſome of theſe great Men are ſtill extant; and, if we conſult only *Plato*, *Ariſtotle*, and the *Roman* Philoſopher *Tully*, we may ſee how far Reaſon and Philoſophy could and did carry theſe Men in Matters of Religion and Morality.

From theſe and ſuch-like Inſtances we are apt to form a general Notion of the Powers of human Reaſon; and the Argument appears undeniable: Thus far human Reaſon did go without the Help of the Goſpel, thus far therefore it certainly can go.

It may be worth our while to conſider this Caſe, not with an Intent to depreciate the Worth of theſe, the beſt and greateſt Men of Antiquity, but to ſtate it clearly and fairly, as far as it does, or may be ſuppoſed to affect the Argument for the Neceſſity of Revelation.

Suppoſing then, in the firſt Place, all that is ſaid of theſe wiſe Men to be true, and that they did arrive at a clear and diſtinct Knowledge of God, and of the Religion that was due to him; yet it will weigh but little in the preſent Conſideration, for this

plain

plain Reaſon; becauſe Religion, if it is of any uſe at all, is equally of uſe to all Men: For, ſince all Men live under the Impreſſion of natural Conſcience, and the Senſe of being accountable for their Actions, they all equally want Direction; and, as the Experience of the World ſhews, all Men will have ſome Religion, either good or bad. To ſay therefore that Reaſon was ſufficient for the Purpoſes of Religion before the Publication of the Goſpel, and to prove it by ſhewing that it ſerved this Purpoſe in four or five *Inſtances* in an Age, whilſt Millions and Millions had no Help from it, is quite miſtaking the Point: We want ſomething to be of uſe to all Men, and which all Men ſtand in need of to their Well-being: You have found ſomething that will ſerve perhaps one in a Million, and think that you have diſcovered an adequate Supply for the general Want. But what muſt become of the many Thouſands who are incapable of being the better for your Method? If the whole Nation were infected with the Plague, it would be worth while to ſend even to the *Indies* for a Man who could cure them; but, if his Remedy could cure only two or three in the Kingdom, it would be of no great Conſequence whether he came, or ſtaid away.

But

But it may be ſaid, that what Reaſon did for a few, it was capable of doing for all, if it had been duly attended to; and, conſequently, that Reaſon was a ſufficient Foundation for true Religion, notwithſtanding that true Religion was loſt in the World; which was not through a Defect in Reaſon, but through the Abuſe and Miſapplication of it by the generality of Mankind.

I agree the Caſe to be ſo; but we are ſtill where we were before: For this general Abuſe of Reaſon, or Inattention to the Voice of it, which had ſpread over the whole World, had certainly a Root in ſome general Evil and Corruption that had infected Mankind: And, whatever Reaſon was in itſelf, yet it ſtood in great Want of a Remedy for this Evil, that had ſo univerſally darkened and obſcured it. Suppoſe I ſhould ſay ſuch a Man was blind; will it be a proper Reply to ſay, No, his Eyes are ſound and good, excepting only that there is a very thick Film over them, which intercepts all Sight? or would it be proper to inſiſt that the Man wanted no Cure, becauſe he had ſound Eyes? What ſhall we do with this Film then? for, till it is removed, the Man might as well be without Eyes. This was the very Caſe of the Heathen World. You ſay they had

Reaſon

Reaſon ſufficient for all the Purpoſes of Religion: Be it ſo; yet, in fact, it is certain they were never able to make this Uſe of it for Ages together. Since the Coming of Chriſt the World has been able to make this Uſe of their Reaſon: And now, at laſt, it is become a great Queſtion, whether a Cure has been wrought, or no.

But conſider farther, when we talk of Reaſon abſtractedly as a Principle of human Actions, it is right to ſay that Reaſon can do whatever we ſee any Man perform by the Help of his Reaſon; and therefore it is true that Reaſon can meaſure the Magnitude and Diſtances of the heavenly Bodies: But is it alſo true that every Man's Reaſon can do this? by no means; and therefore to conſider all Men as capable of doing what we ſee ſome great Geniuſes able to do, is abſolutely abſurd. Now, the few whom you ſuppoſe to have attained to a juſt Notion of God and of Religion in the Heathen World, what were they? Men brought up in Retirement and Study, of great Induſtry and Application, who ſpent their Lives in ſearching into the Cauſes of Things: And, even of thoſe many who followed this Method of Life and Study, there are but few who can with any Pretence be ſaid to have diſcovered the

the Truth: The Croud of Philoſophers talked much more, but knew as little as the People. But, the People themſelves, what muſt become of them? They have no Time for Study, and they muſt have true Notions of Religion at a cheaper Rate, or not at all. As Religion is a Thing in which all Men are concerned, it muſt be conveyed in a Manner that ſuits Men of all Conditions. Suppoſing therefore that you have found a Way by which ſome few thoughtful Men obtained true Notions of Religion, you are far from having found a Way of propagating true Religion in the World. Reaſoning will not do the Buſineſs: And therefore the Goſpel ſet out in another Manner, by propoſing the great Truths of Religion in the plaineſt and ſimpleſt Manner in an authoritative Way, but by an Authority ſupported by the plaineſt and the ſtrongeſt Proof, the Proof of Miracles; an Argument that was adapted to Men of all Conditions, and made its Way to every Underſtanding.

It is become a Faſhion to dreſs up the great Doctrines and Proofs of Religion in Axioms and Theorems and Demonſtrations; and thoſe who have taken Pains in this Way may have done great Service to Men of Thought and Contemplation: But, had the Goſpel

Goſpel ſet out at firſt with this Air of Mathematics, it had loſt one ſtrong Proof of its divine Original, ariſing from the Plainneſs of its Doctrine, and the Simplicity of the Evidence which was offered in its behalf; which made the Goſpel to be a proper Tender to all Mankind. All Mankind are concerned in the great Truths of Religion; and nothing can be more abſurd, and contradictory to the Notion of God's Wiſdom and Goodneſs, than to ſuppoſe God to intend to eſtabliſh true Religion in the World, and yet to offer it in a Method which could poſſibly have an Influence but on very few. Whoever will reflect ſeriouſly on the Nature and Condition of Mankind in general, will be able to give himſelf a clear Reaſon why God did not call in the Aſſiſtance of the *Wiſdom of the World* to propagate the Goſpel, but choſe rather to eſtabliſh it by the *Fooliſhneſs of Preaching*, as it is called, and by the *Demonſtration of the Spirit*, manifeſted in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works.

I have hitherto conſidered this Plea, drawn from the Caſe of ſome great Men in the Heathen World, upon ſuppoſition that what is ſaid of them is true, and that they had indeed extricated themſelves from the Superſtitions of their Country, and attained juſt

Notions of true Religion: But this Thing, which has been often ſaid, has never been proved, and I am afraid never will.

I do not wonder that thoſe who have been converſant in the Writings of the Antients, and have been entertained with the juſt and fine Reflections to be met with on the Attributes of God, conſidered as Maker and Governor of the World, and of Mankind in particular, ſhould conclude that thoſe who thought and talked ſo clearly of the great Attributes of the Deity, and of his Providence over the World, had alſo as clear Notions of the religious Service due to him, and to him only. What has led to this Concluſion I conceive to be this: There is ſo plain a Connection between the Relation we bear to God, and the religious Duty owing to him, and the Argument is ſo familiar to us, that we almoſt naturally ſuppoſe that every Man, who maintains the Principle, cannot fail of ſeeing the Concluſion.

The Concluſion indeed is ſo natural, that, if it were overlooked, nothing can more ſenſibly prove the Weakneſs of human Reaſon in oppoſition to inveterate Errors and Superſtition; and nothing can more effectually ſhew us how unable theſe wiſe Men were

to reform the World, ſince with all their Wiſdom they were not able to reform themſelves. Yet this was the Truth of the Caſe; and it was not at random, and without Knowledge of the Fact, that St. *Paul* lays this to the Charge of the wiſe Men of the World, *That, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their fooliſh Heart was darkened. Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became Fools; and changed the Glory of the uncorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beaſts, and creeping Things.*

To prove the Truth of the Apoſtle's Aſſertion, that even the wiſe Men, who *knew God*, did *not glorify* him *as God*, by an Induction of Particulars, would be undertaking a Work which could hardly be well diſcharged in this Place. But yet the Point is too material to be paſſed over in Silence. Let us then conſider the Caſe of one only, but of One, who among the good Men was the beſt, and among the wiſe ones the wiſeſt. I ſhall eaſily be underſtood to mean *Socrates*, the great Philoſopher of *Athens*: And, were the wiſe Men of Antiquity to

plead their Cauſe in common, they could not put their Defence into better Hands.

We have an Account of the ſpeculative Opinions of many of the wiſe Men of *Greece* preſerved to us in Authors of great Credit; but of their Practice, and perſonal Behaviour in Life, little is ſaid: Which makes it hard to judge how far their own Practice and Conduct was influenced by their Opinions, or how conſiſtent they were in purſuing the Conſequences of their own Doctrines. The Caſe might have been the ſame with *Socrates*, had not a very particular Circumſtance put him under a Neceſſity of explaining his Conduct and Practice with reſpect to the Religion of his Country. He had talked ſo freely of the Heathen Deities, and the ridiculous Stories told of them, that he fell under a Suſpicion of deſpiſing the Gods of his Country, and of teaching the Youth of *Athens* to deſpiſe their Altars and their Worſhip. Upon this Accuſation he is ſummoned before the great Court of the Areopagites; and happily the Apology he made for himſelf is preſerved to us by two the ableſt of his Scholars, and the beſt Writers of Antiquity, *Plato* and *Xenophon*: And from both their Accounts it appears, that *Socrates* maintained and aſſerted before his Judges, That he

worſhiped

worſhiped the Gods of his Country, and that he ſacrificed in private and in public upon the allowed Altars, and according to the Rites and Cuſtoms of the City. After this public Confeſſion, ſo authentically reported by two ſo able Hands, there can be no Doubt of his Caſe. He was an Idolater, and had not, by his great Knowledge and Ability in Reaſoning, delivered himſelf from the Practice of the Superſtition of his Country. You ſee how far the Wiſdom of the World could go: Give me Leave to ſhew you what the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching could do in the very ſame Caſe.

St. *Paul* was in the ſame Caſe: He was accuſed in the ſame City of *Athens* of the ſame Crime, That he was a Setter-forth of ſtrange Gods; and before the ſame great Court of Areopagites he made his Apology, which is likewiſe preſerved to us by St. *Luke* in the ſeventeenth Chapter of the *Acts*. We have then the greateſt and the ableſt among the wiſe Men of *Greece*, and an Apoſtle of Chriſt, in the ſame Circumſtances. You have heard the Philoſopher's Defence, That he worſhiped the Gods of his Country, and as his Country worſhiped them. Hear now the Apoſtle: *Ye Men of Athens*, ſays he, *I perceive that in all Things ye are too ſuperſtitious:*

ſtitious: For, as I paſſed by, and beheld your Devotions, I found an Altar with this Inſcription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worſhip, him declare I unto you: God that made the World, and all Things therein. This God,* he tells them, *is not worſhiped with Men's Hands, as though he needeth any thing: — Nor was the Godhead like unto Gold, or Silver, or Stone, graven by Art and Man's Device.* He then calls upon them, in the Name of this great God, to repent of their Superſtition and Idolatry, which God would no longer bear: *Becauſe he hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given Aſſurance unto all Men, in that he hath raiſed him from the Dead.*

Which of theſe two now was a Preacher of true Religion? Let thoſe who value human Reaſon at the higheſt Rate determine the Point.

The Manner in which *Socrates* died was the calmeſt and the braveſt in the World, and excludes all Pretenſion to ſay that he diſſembled his Opinion and Practice before his Judges out of any Fear, or Meanneſs of Spirit; Vices with which he was never taxed, and of which he ſeems to have been incapable.

Conſider

Conſider then, was it poſſible for any Man, upon the Authority of *Socrates*, to open his Mouth againſt the Idolatry of the Heathen World, or to make uſe of his Name to that Purpoſe, who had ſo ſolemnly, in the Face of his Country, and before the greateſt Judicature of *Greece*, borne Teſtimony to the Gods of his Country, and the Worſhip paid them?

But to proceed: The City of *Athens* ſoon grew ſenſible of the Injury done to the beſt and wiſeſt of their Citizens, and of their own great Miſtake in putting *Socrates* to Death. His Accuſers and his Judges became infamous; and the People grew extravagant in doing Honours to the Memory of the innocent Sufferer: They erected a Statue, nay a Temple, to his Memory; and his Name was had in Honour and Reverence. His Doctrines upon the Subjects of Divinity and Morality were introduced into the World with all the Advantage that the ableſt and politeſt Pens could give; and they became the Study and Entertainment of all the conſiderable Men who lived after him. It is worth obſerving too, that from the Death of *Socrates* to the Birth of Chriſt were, if I remember right, near four hundred Years; which was Time ſufficient to make the Ex-

periment, how far the Wiſdom of *Socrates*, attended with all the Advantages before-mentioned, could go in reforming the World. And what was the Effect of all this? Can you name the Place where Religion was reformed? Can you name the Man who was ſo far reformed, as to renounce the Superſtition of his Country? No; none ſuch are to be found; and how ſhould there? ſince, the greater the Credit and Reputation of *Socrates* were, the more ſtrongly did they draw Men to imitate his Example, and to worſhip as their Country worſhiped.

Conſider, on the other ſide, what was the Conſequence of preaching the Goſpel. St. *Paul* entertained the *Athenians* with no fine Speculations; but he laid before them, in the plaineſt Dreſs, the great and momentous Truths of Religion; he openly rebuked their Idolatry, and condemned their Superſtition. The Goſpel was publiſhed in the ſame Manner every-where. The firſt Preachers of it were enabled to ſupport it by Miracles; and moſt of them ſhed their Blood in defence of its Truth. By theſe Means they came likewiſe to have Credit and Authority in the World. But in theſe two Caſes there was this great Difference: The corrupt Example of *Socrates* was a dead Weight upon the Purity

Purity of his Doctrine, and tended to perpetuate Superſtition in the World: The Authority and Example of the Apoſtles went hand in hand, and united their Force to root out Idolatry. There was this farther Difference too: The Doctrines of *Socrates* could go only among the Learned: The Doctrines of the Goſpel were artleſs and plain, and ſuited to every Man's Capacity.

For near four hundred Years the Diſciples of *Socrates* had the World to themſelves, to reform it if they could; in all which Time there is no Evidence remaining that the Religion of the World was the better for their Wiſdom. But in much leſs Time the Goſpel prevailed in moſt Parts of the known World: Wherever it came, Superſtition and Idolatry fled before it: And in little more than three Centuries the Empire became Chriſtian; which completed the Victory over the Heathen Deities. And, if we may judge by this Compariſon between the wiſeſt of the Heathens and an Apoſtle of Chriſt, the Doctrine of the Text will be fully verified; *That the World by Wiſdom knew not God, and that God by the Fooliſhneſs of Preaching has provided Salvation for them who believe.*

I have gone through the principal Points which the Text led me to conſider, and ſhall add

add but few Words by way of Reflection on the whole.

If then it appears from Hiſtory, and the Experience of the World before us, that Men for Ages together lived in Ignorance of the true God, and of true Religion, and that Reaſon was not able to contend againſt inveterate Errors and Superſtitions; let us not be ſo vain as to imagine that we could have done more in the ſame Circumſtances, than all or any who lived in the many Ages of Idolatry. If we conſider to what Height Arts and Sciences were carried in thoſe Days, and the Politeneſs of *Greece* and *Rome* in all Parts of Learning, we ſhall have little Reaſon to imagine that Men have grown wiſer as the World has grown older. If we have more Reaſon in Matters of Religion, and undoubtedly we have more, it ſhould lead us to conſider to whom we are indebted for the happy Change, and to give Praiſe to Him who ſet the Reaſon of Mankind free from the Chains under which it had been faſt bound for Ages together by Superſtition and Idolatry.

When we conſider the Means made uſe of by God for reſtoring true Religion in the World, and pretend to judge of the Fitneſs of them to attain the End propoſed, we ſhould

ſhould be aware of being miſled by the Conceits of ſome who think themſelves wiſe enough to give Directions in a Matter of ſo great Moment. Some may imagine it might be better, if the Goſpel had reaſoned more philoſophically on the Nature of the Deity, or more fully explained the Nature of the human Soul; and others may wiſh that other abſtruſe Points of Reaſon and Divinity had been cleared to their Satisfaction. But this was not the Errand Chriſt came on: He came to teach true Religion, and to teach it to all Men; and therefore what was not fit for all was no Part of his Buſineſs. The *Greeks* ſought after Wiſdom, and the *Jews* required a Sign: But the Preachers of the Goſpel had no Commiſſion to ſatisfy the Curioſity of one or of the other; but to teach the Doctrines of God in ſuch a Manner, and to prove them by ſuch Means, as might influence and affect as well the loweſt as the higheſt. If then the Means made uſe of to introduce the Goſpel into the World were ſuch as were proper and neceſſary to ſubdue antient Errors and Prejudices; if the Truths taught by Chriſt are a proper Foundation for all the Duties of Religion in which Man can have any Concern; if they are left to be ſupported in the World, and

propagated

propagated from Age to Age, by Methods which by Experience have been found effectual, and which, human Nature conſidered, muſt be effectual to preſerve the Profeſſion of Religion amongſt Men: If, I ſay, we diſcover theſe Marks in the Goſpel, we ſee enough to convince us that the Goſpel is the Power of God and the Wiſdom of God unto Salvation; which is ſeeing all that we are concerned to look after, or have any Pretence to expect from Him who came to ſave and to redeem us.

Laſtly, Since we have the Experience of many Ages before us to ſhew us how unable human Reaſon is to ſtruggle againſt the Errors and Follies of Superſtition, when once they have got Poſſeſſion; ſince from our own Experience we know how much Reaſon is indebted to the Light of the Goſpel; we ſhould be careful to preſerve this Light, for fear of falling back again into the wretched State from which we have been delivered, or into a worſe. Reaſon was once, what the Light of the Goſpel is now, a ſufficient Guide in Religion: But, when Men grew corrupt and vain in their Imaginations, Superſtition and Error prevailed over the World, and falſe Religion led Reaſon in Triumph for Ages together.

As Reaſon was ſubdued, the Light of the Goſpel may be; and will be, when the ſame Cauſes meet to work together: A Conſideration that ſhould make Men, who have any Senſe of Religion, think ſeriouſly of the Treatment the Goſpel every Day meets with. If we uſe it no better, it may ſoon leave us; and, when once we get rid of this Fooliſhneſs of Preaching, we know, by ſad Experience, what is to be expected from the Wiſdom of the World.

DISCOURSE V.

JOHN iii. 16.

God ſo loved the World, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting Life.

IN this Paſſage of Scripture, and in many others, the Redemption of the World by Chriſt Jeſus is aſcribed to the Love and Goodneſs of God towards Mankind. Whatever other Difficulties Men may find in the Goſpel, one would ſuppoſe that it might be admitted to be, at leaſt, a good Repreſentation of the divine Mercy towards Mankind, and fully to diſplay that Tenderneſs and Compaſſion to our Weakneſſes and Infirmities, which we all hope for, and with

ſome

ſome Reaſon expect to receive, from our great Creator, whoſe *Mercy is over all his Works.*

The Caſe being ſo, who would expect to hear any Objection againſt the Goſpel derived from the Topics of divine Mercy and Goodneſs? Yet ſome there are, who think the Mercy of the Goſpel to be imperfect, and that Nature gives far better Hopes to all her Children. They conceive the Infirmities of human Nature to be unavoidable, and the Mercy of God to be infinite; and from theſe Conſiderations they raiſe Hopes as unbounded as they conceive the Mercy to be. As they derive theſe ſtrong Aſſurances from natural Reaſon, they conceive all Promiſes of Mercy to be unneceſſary, and therefore to be ſuſpected; and the Argument is worked up not only to be an Objection againſt the Goſpel Revelation, but againſt all Revelations, either paſt or to come.

There is nothing of more Conſequence to the Credit and Authority of Revelation, than to reconcile it to the natural Notions and the natural Hopes and Expectations of Mankind; and indeed the Promiſes of the Goſpel and the Hopes of Nature are founded on the ſame common Principles. Aſk a Chriſtian, why

why did God redeem Mankind by ſending his Son into the World? he muſt anſwer, becauſe Men were Sinners, weak, and miſerable, and unable to reſcue themſelves from their wretched Condition. Aſk him, what moved God to expreſs ſo much Concern for ſuch worthleſs Objects? he muſt reſolve it into the Goodneſs, and Tenderneſs, and paternal Affection of God, with which he embraces all the Sons of Men.

Aſk the Deiſt, upon what Grounds he has Hope and Confidence towards God? he will reply, That he conceives it impoſſible for a beneficent Being to be rigorous and ſevere towards the Crimes and Follies of ſuch weak, fooliſh, and impotent Creatures, as Men: That their Iniquities, though againſt the Light of Nature, yet flow from a Defect in the Powers of Nature; ſince 'tis no Man's Fault that he is not ſtronger, or wiſer, or better, than he was made to be: And therefore, though the Light of Reaſon renders him accountable for his Actions, yet his Want of Power to do what his Reaſon approves, will make his Defects excuſable in the Sight of his equitable Judge.

You ſee how nearly Natural Religion and the Goſpel are allied in the Foundation of

their Hopes and Expectations. 'Tis pity ſuch near Friends, who have one common Intereſt, ſhould have any Diſputes. But Diſputes there are.

Far be from us to weaken the Hopes of Nature. The Goſpel is no Enemy to theſe Hopes; ſo far otherwiſe, that all the Hopes and Expectations of Nature are ſo many Preparations to the Goſpel of Chriſt, and lead us to embrace that Mercy offered by Chriſt, which Nature ſo long and ſo earneſtly has ſought after.

But the Queſtion is, whether theſe natural Hopes can give us ſuch Security of Pardon, and of Life and Immortality, as will juſtify us in rejecting the Light of Revelation? Now, whoever depends on the Forgiveneſs of God, admits himſelf to be in a Caſe that wants Pardon; that is, admits himſelf to be a Sinner. This being the Caſe of Mankind in general, let it be conſidered,

Firſt, That Natural Religion could not be originally founded in the Conſideration of Man's being a Sinner, and in the Expectation of Pardon.

Secondly, That the Hopes which we are able to form in our preſent Circumſtances, are too weak and imperfect to give us entire Satisfaction.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That the Coming of Chriſt has ſupplied theſe Defects, and has perfected and completed the Hopes of Nature.

It muſt be allowed, That the original Religion of Nature was agreeable to the original State of Nature: And conſequently, if Natural Religion is founded in the Conſideration of Man's Sin and Weakneſs, it follows, That Man was originally formed a Sinner and weak. But farther,

Suppoſing Men made originally to be what we ſee they are, upon what Grounds are we to hope for an Alteration for the better? For, if it was conſiſtent with God's Goodneſs to put Men into this State originally, how is it inconſiſtent with his Goodneſs to continue that State, which was at firſt his own Appointment? He could no more act inconſiſtently with his Goodneſs at the Beginning of the World, than he can at the End of it. If Reaſon therefore admits the preſent State of the World to be of God's Appointment, it muſt never afterwards pretend to entertain Hopes of being delivered from it; and without ſuch Hopes all Religion is vain and uſeleſs.

It may be thought perhaps, That, ſuppoſing the preſent State of Things to be of God's Appointment, we cannot be anſwerable

for what we do; for why ſhould he blame us for doing the Work he has appointed? Allow this Reaſoning; yet no Religion can be built on it; for it can go no farther than to ſay that we ought not to be puniſhed for our Doings: It can never ſhew that we have any Title to be put into a better State: The utmoſt it can pretend to prove, is, that we are abſolutely unaccountable; and, if ſo, there is nothing we can do to leſs Purpoſe, than to trouble our Heads about Religion.

Farther, If the Laws of Nature are the Precepts of Natural Religion, as without all doubt they are, it follows, That Natural Religion can be nothing elſe but Obedience to the Laws of Nature; and, conſequently, the genuine Hopes of Natural Religion muſt be founded in Obedience. This muſt neceſſarily be the Caſe; for all Laws are made to be obeyed. No Prince was ever ſo abſurd as to make Laws with this View, that his Subjects might break them, and he ſhew his Goodneſs in pardoning their Tranſgreſſions: And yet this muſt have been the Scheme of Providence, if Natural Religion was nothing elſe from the Beginning but an Expectation of Pardon for Sin.

Secondly, Let us take a View of our preſent State, without inquiring whether any

and

and what Change has happened to put us into this Condition; and let us conſider what may be expected from our preſent Circumſtances. Two Things may be affirmed with Certainty of the preſent Condition of Mankind: One is, That they have a Senſe of their Obligation to obey the Laws of Reaſon and Nature; which is evident from the Force of natural Conſcience: The other is, That very few do in any tolerable Degree, and none perfectly, pay this Obedience.

Let us examine then how Religion will ſtand upon theſe Circumſtances. It is impoſſible to found the Hopes of Religion on Innocence and Obedience; for Obedience is not paid. On the other hand, abſolute Impunity cannot be claimed for all Sins; much leſs can any Degree of Happineſs, either preſent or future, be claimed in behalf of Offenders. The utmoſt Probability to which human Reaſon can arrive in this Caſe, is, That, the Goodneſs of God and the Weakneſs of Man conſidered, God may favourably accept our Endeavours, how imperfect ſoever our Attainments may be. But is this Reaſoning built on infallible Principles? Can any Certainty or Security ariſe out of this? any that can give Reſt or Peace to the Mind of Man, ever inquiſitive after Futurity? Will

you promiſe Impunity to Offenders upon Repentance? Impunity, mere Impunity, is not the Thing that Nature ſeeks after: She craves ſomething more. But can the Argument from the divine Mercy be carried farther? Is it not great Mercy to pardon Sinners? Can you with Decency deſire a Reward for them? Our Saviour has told us, that, when we have done our beſt, we muſt ſtill own *that we are unprofitable Servants:* And, if we reflect that all our natural Powers are the Gift of God, and, conſequently, our beſt Services are but a Debt paid to the Donor; if we conſider that in all we do there is no Profit to the Moſt High, that His Power and Majeſty are not exalted by our Service, nor leſſened by our Neglect; we ſhall find that our own Reaſon teaches us the ſame Leſſon, and that, when we confeſs ourſelves unprofitable Servants, we give greater Evidence of our Underſtanding than of our Humility. And, if this be truly the Caſe, what are the Claims of Natural Religion? Are they not the Claims of unprofitable Servants? the Claims of thoſe to whom nothing is due?

Thirdly, Let us now take a View of the Conditions and Promiſes of the Goſpel, and ſee whether we have any Reaſon to be

offended at them. As to the Laws which are made the Conditions of our Happineſs, they are not new Impoſitions, but as old as Reaſon itſelf, and the very ſame which Natural Religion ſtands bound to obey. Here then can be no Complaint, at leaſt no juſt one. So far then we are quite ſafe, that we can be no Loſers by the Goſpel, ſince it lays no new Burden on us. In all other Reſpects our Caſe is extremely altered for the better. We feel ourſelves eaſily tempted to do wrong, and unable to pay the Obedience we owe to Righteouſneſs. Hopes therefore from our Innocence we have none, but are forced to have recourſe to the Mercy of God. Now this Mercy, which we hope for, the Goſpel offers us in the Name of God. Have we any Reaſon to ſuſpect the Offer? or to reject that very Mercy, when promiſed by God, which our own Reaſon teaches us to expect at his Hands?

If we ſin, Nature has no Refuge but in Repentance; and how far that will go, we know not: Nature has not, cannot teach us this Knowledge. From the Goſpel we learn, that true Repentance ſhall never be in vain; ſhall not only protect us from Puniſhment, but ſhall alſo ſet open to us the Doors of Life and Immortality. There you may view

Religion once more reſtored to its native Hope of Glory and Life for evermore. You will be no longer obliged to wander in the Mazes and Intricacies of human Reaſon, and to ſpeculate upon the Attributes of divine Mercy and Juſtice; the Limits and Boundaries of which are not to be determined by the Wit of Man, and the Contemplation of which abounds with Terrors as well as Hopes: But you may ſee the clear and immutable Purpoſe of God to give Salvation to all who, with penitent Hearts, and a firm Reliance on his Word, endeavour after Righteouſneſs.

One would imagine the Goſpel ſhould eaſily find Credit with Men, when all its Promiſes do ſo exactly tally and correſpond with the Hopes of Nature. Has Nature any Reaſon to complain of this? Is it an Objection to the Goſpel, that it has confirmed all your Hopes and Expectations, that it has given you the Security of God's Promiſe to eſtabliſh the very Wiſhes of your Heart? You truſt, you ſay, that He who made you ſtill retains ſome Love for you: To convince you that he does, *he has ſent his well-beloved Son into the World to ſave Sinners.* Though you offend, yet you hope on Repentance to be forgiven: The Goſpel confirms this Hope;

Hope; the Terms of it are more beneficial, and convey to true Penitents not only Hope, but a Claim to Pardon. But Pardon only will not ſatisfy: There is ſtill ſomething farther that Nature craves, ſomething which with unutterable Groans ſhe pants after, even Life and Happineſs for evermore. She ſees all her Children go down to the Grave: All beyond the Grave is to her one wide Waſte, a Land of Doubt and Uncertainty: When ſhe looks into it, ſhe has her Hopes, and ſhe has her Fears; and, agitated by the Viciſſitude of theſe Paſſions, ſhe finds no Ground whereon to reſt her Foot. How different is the Scene which the Goſpel opens! There we ſee the heavenly *Canaan*, the new *Jeruſalem*; in which City of the great God there are Manſions, many Manſions, for receiving them, *who through Faith, and patient Continuance in Well-doing, ſeek for Glory and Immortality*. Our bleſſed Maſter has aboliſhed Death, and redeemed us into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God, that we may dwell in his Preſence as long as Time itſelf ſhall laſt.

If we were to form a Syſtem of Religion for ourſelves that ſhould anſwer to all our Wiſhes and Deſires, what more could we aſk for ourſelves than what the Goſpel has offered?

offered? The Obedience required of us is the ſame to which we are antecedently bound in virtue of that Reaſon and Underſtanding which make us to be Men. The Promiſes of the Goſpel extend to more than Nature could ever claim; they take in all her Wiſhes, eſtabliſh all her Hopes; and they are offered by a Hand that is able to make them good.

The Concluſion of the whole is, That, ſince the Religion of a Sinner muſt neceſſarily be founded in the Hopes of Mercy; ſince theſe Hopes have at beſt but uncertain Foundation in Natural Religion, and are liable to be diſturbed and ſhaken by frequent Doubts and Miſgivings of Mind; we have great Reaſon to bleſs and adore the Goodneſs of God, who has openly diſplayed before our Eyes the Love that he has for the Children of Men, by ſending *his well-beloved Son into the World, that all who believe in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting Life.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE VI.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

And hath brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Goſpel.

THESE Words being ſpoken of our bleſſed Saviour, and affirming that he through the Goſpel brought Life and Immortality to Light, are thought by ſome to be excluſive of all Arguments for a future Immortality, drawn either from the Light of Reaſon and Nature, or from the Writings of *Moſes:* For, if the Hopes of Immortality were ſo ſupported before the Coming of Chriſt Jeſus, it could not be truly aſſerted of him, *that he brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Goſpel.* And ſo [illegible] at leaſt they muſt be allowed to argue juſtly, that,

that, if the Text is to be underſtood in this exclusive Senſe, it will affect the Proofs and Authorities of any former Revelation equally with thoſe of Senſe and Reaſon. But then, on the other ſide, 'tis certain, that, if this Argument does not impeach the Authority of *Moſes* with regard to this fundamental Article of Faith, neither will it ſhut out the Proofs of Natural Religion; ſince it muſt deſtroy the Evidence of both, or of neither. Now, that it does not ſet aſide the Authority of *Moſes*, is evident from our Saviour's Argument to the *Sadducees*: *Now that the Dead are raiſed, even Moſes ſhewed at the Buſh, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob.* Luke xx. 37. From whence it appears, that our Saviour thought the Law of *Moſes* afforded good Proof of a future Life; which is inconſiſtent with the Suppoſition that there was no Evidence for Life and Immortality till the Publication of the Goſpel.

But, ſuppoſing *Moſes* or the Law of Nature to afford Evidence for a future Life and Immortality, it remains to be conſidered, in what Senſe the Words of the Text are to be underſtood, which do affirm *that Life and Immortality were brought to Light through the Goſpel*. To bring any thing to Light may

may ſignify, according to the Idiom of the *Engliſh* Tongue, to diſcover or reveal a Thing which was perfectly unknown before: But the Word in the Original is ſo far from countenancing, that it will hardly admit of this Senſe. The *Greek* runs thus; φωτίσαντος δὲ ζωὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν. Now φωτίζειν ſignifies (not to bring to Light, but) to enlighten, illuſtrate, or clear up any thing. You may judge by the Uſe of the Word in other Places: 'Tis uſed in *John* i. 9. *That was the true Light, which lighteth* (or enlighteneth) *every Man that cometh into the World*; ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον. Jeſus Chriſt did not by coming into the World bring Men to Light; but he did by the Goſpel enlighten Men, and make thoſe, who were dark and ignorant before, wiſe even to Salvation. In like manner our Lord did enlighten the Doctrine of Life and Immortality, not by giving the firſt or only Notice of it, but by clearing up the Doubts and Difficulties under which it laboured, and giving a better Evidence for the Truth and Certainty of it, than Nature or any Revelation before had done. There is one Place more where our Tranſlators render the original Words as they have done in the Text: 1 *Cor.* iv. 5, *Therefore judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord*

Lord come, who both will bring to Light the hidden Things of Darkneſs, and will make manifeſt the Counſels of the Hearts; and then ſhall every Man have Praiſe of God. But in this Place it had been more properly rendered, *who will caſt Light upon* the hidden Things of Darkneſs; and, ſo rendered, it better ſuits what follows, and *will make manifeſt* the Counſels of the Heart. The hidden Things of Darkneſs, which ſhall be brought to Light at the Coming of the Lord, are the Actions and Practices of wicked Men; which, though they are of a certain and determinate Nature, are yet hard to judge of, becauſe we cannot diſcern the Springs and Motives from whence they ariſe: Perfectly unknown to us they are not; if they were, there was no Occaſion for the Apoſtle to forbid us judging of them; for Men do not, cannot judge at all of Things which do not at all fall under their Notice: But they are ſo dark and obſcure, that 'tis hard to judge rightly of them; and therefore 'tis but prudent to ſuſpend our Sentence till the Day comes which will make all Things clear, which will hold ſuch a Light to theſe hidden Things of Darkneſs, that we ſhall manifeſtly diſcern them, and be able to view them on every Side. So that, in this Caſe, the

the hidden Things of Darkneſs are not ſuppoſed to be perfectly unknown, but only to be ſo dark and involved, that we cannot ſafely paſs our Judgment on them; and *to bring them to Light* imports no more than to ſet them in a clear Light, and to make them plain and manifeſt to the Eyes of all the World. According to the Uſe then of the original Word, *to bring Life and Immortality to Light* ſignifies to illuſtrate and make plain this great Doctrine of Religion, to diſpel the Doubts and Uncertainties in which it was involved, and to give evident Proof and Demonſtration to the World of the Certainty of a future Life and Immortality.

The Text, thus explained, leaves us at Liberty to make the beſt both of the Evidence of Nature and of *Moſes* for a future Life and Immortality, and aſſerts nothing to the Goſpel but this Prerogative, That it has given a ſurer and fuller Proof of this fundamental Article, than ever the World before was acquainted with. The true Point then now before us, and which takes in the whole View of the Text, is, to conſider the Evidence which Mankind had for the Doctrine of Immortality before the Coming of Chriſt, and the Evidence which the Goſpel now affords; and to ſhew where the former

Evidence

Evidence failed, and how it is ſupplied by the latter.

It would take up too much Time to examine minutely the ſeveral Arguments for the Immortality of the Soul, which are to be found in the Writings of Heathen Authors; nor would it perhaps anſwer the Purpoſe of our preſent Inquiry: For the natural Evidence in this Caſe is not ſo much to be eſtimated by the Acuteneſs of this or that Writer, as by the common Senſe and Apprehenſion of Mankind: And this, and all other Opinions which have any Pretence to derive themſelves from Nature, owe their Authority not to the abſtracted Reaſonings of any School, but to ſome general Senſe and Notion which is found in all Men, or to ſome common and uncontroverted Maxim of Reaſon. The Unbelievers of this Age have abuſed their Time and Pains in their Endeavours to expoſe the natural Evidence of Immortality, by confronting the different Sentiments of the antient Philoſophers, and by ſhewing their Uncertainty and Inconſiſtency: For what if *Plato*, if *Ariſtotle*, if *Tully*, are inconſiſtent with one another, or with themſelves, in their abſtracted Arguings upon this Point? What is this to the Evidence of Nature, which is not the ſingle Opinion

Opinion of *Plato*, or any other Philoſopher, but the united Voice of all Mankind? This was the common Belief of the World, derived from ſome common Senſe, or Principle of Reaſon, before any Philoſopher had ſo much as thought of an abſtracted Reaſon for the Proof of it: And, had not the common Senſe of Nature dictated this Truth to them, I am very confident the philoſophical Reaſons had never been thought of. That the common Belief and Perſuaſion was the Foundation of the philoſophical Inquiry, is evident from hence, That all the antient Writers upon this Subject appeal to the common Notion and Conſent of Mankind, as one great Argument for the Truth of the Doctrine: Which certainly proves this at leaſt, That the World was poſſeſſed of this Belief long before they were Writers, or ever the philoſophical Reaſons were thought of. If the Notion was common, that alone is a ſufficient Proof that it did not ariſe from abſtracted Reaſoning; for no common Opinion ever did, or ever can: And the Reaſon is plain; for a common Opinion is that which is received by the generality of Men, who never were, who never will be, capable of attending to abſtracted Reaſon. Nor this

natural Evidence, diſtinguiſhed from the Intricacies of Philoſophy, is the Thing which we inquire after, and which will ſtand its Ground, whatever becomes of the private Notions of learned Men: For Nature may be in the right in giving Notice of a future Life, however Men may be miſtaken, when they come to conſider and aſcertain the Nature and Cauſe of it; which to do is the Mark and Aim of Philoſophy.

But the common Conſent is the Voice and Law of Nature; for what all agree in muſt needs derive itſelf from ſomething that is common to all; and what is ſo, but the Senſe and Inſtinct of Nature? When Men come to Speculation, they differ as much in the Caſt and Turn of their Minds, as they do in the Features and Lineaments of their Faces; and therefore ſpeculative Reaſoning will never produce a common Perſuaſion.

This Belief and Perſuaſion of the Certainty of a future Life aroſe from the common Senſe that Men have of the Difference of Good and Evil, and of every Man's being accountable for the Things done in this World; which Account not being taken in this World, as the leaſt Degree of Obſervation will enable Men to ſee, they concluded,

or

or rather they felt from the very Force of Reaſon and Conſcience, that there was an Account to be given hereafter. Such an internal Argument as this, which ſprings up in the Heart and from the Heart of every Man, has a greater Weight in it, than all the Reaſonings of Philoſophy put together, and will tie Men down, if not to hope for, yet at leaſt to fear a future Immortality; either of which is the ſilent Voice of Nature teſtifying the Reality of a Life to come.

That this is the true Foundation of the univerſal Belief of a future Life, may be learnt from hence, That the Perſuaſion of another Life was always connected with the Suppoſition that there were different States for good and bad Men; ſo that you cannot any-where trace the Notion of Immortality, but you find Evidence alſo for the different Conditions of Men in another Life, according as they have behaved themſelves in this. Now, theſe two Opinions being thus inſeparably united, it is eaſy to judge which is the natural Senſe, and which the Conſequence: Let any Man try, and he will find, that it is not the Expectation of living that makes Men infer the Reaſonableneſs or Neceſſity of a Judgment, but it is the reaſonable and natural Expectation of Judgment

which makes them infer the Neceſſity and Reality of a future Life.

Into what great Abſurdities this natural Notion grew under the Management of Poets, is well known: They named the Princes and the Judges, and deſcribed the Tortures of the Wicked, as their Fancies led them; and their Inventions became the vulgar Theology. But this ſtill ſhews the Truth of what I have aſſerted; for neither would the Poets, whoſe Buſineſs it is to raiſe fine Scenes upon the Plan and Probability of Nature, have ſo painted the Torments and the Enjoyments of Men departed, neither would the World have received their Inventions, had there been no Foundation in Nature to ſupport the Romance.

As to ſuch as imagine that the Notion of a future Life aroſe from the Deſcriptions and Inventions of Poets, they may e'en as well ſuppoſe that Eating and Drinking had the ſame Original, and that Men had never thought of it but for the fine Feaſts and Entertainments which are deſcribed in ſuch Writers. The Poets were the Papiſts of Antiquity, who corrupted the genuine Sentiments of Nature, and obſcured the Light of Reaſon, by introducing the wild Conceits of Folly and Superſtition: And, when once they

they had grafted the Slips of Superſtition upon the Stock of Nature, they throve ſo faſt, and grew ſo rank, that the natural Branches were even ſtarved by the Luxuriancy of this wild Olive. But ſtill the Root was natural, though the Fruit was wild. All that Nature teaches is, That there is a future Life, diſtinguiſhed into different States of Happineſs and Miſery, in which Men will be rewarded or puniſhed, according as they have purſued or neglected the Rules of Virtue and Honour. And this Notion prevailed where the Fables of *Greece* had never been heard of; and wicked Men felt in themſelves the Fear of the Wrath which is to come, though they had never ſo much as learnt the Name of *Tantalus* or *Siſyphus*, or any other Sufferer in the Poets' Scene of Hell.

The natural Evidence then of Life and Immortality ſtands equally clear of the Inventions of Poetry, and the Subtilties and Refinements of Philoſophy; and, though it be allied to both, yet it aroſe from neither. The Truth of the Caſe with regard to both is this: The Poets found Men in poſſeſſion of the Doctrine of a future State with Rewards and Puniſhments for good and bad Men: Upon this Foundation they went to

work; and the plain Draught of Nature was almoſt hid under the Shades and Colours with which they endeavoured to beautify and adorn it. The Philoſophers found the ſame Perſuaſion in themſelves and others, and, as their Profeſſion led them, ſought out for phyſical Reaſons to ſupport the Cauſe. This Inquiry has furniſhed us with the various Opinions of Antiquity concerning the Nature and Operation of the Soul, its Manner of acting in the Body and out of it, its Eternity and Immortality, and many other curious Pieces of Learning. How far any or all of theſe Inquirers into Nature ſucceeded in their Attempt to prove the Immortality of the Soul from phyſical Cauſes, is another Queſtion. As to the preſent Point, 'tis plain the natural Evidence is not concerned in their Succeſs, whatever it is; for the natural Evidence is prior to their Inquiries, and ſtands upon another Foot, upon the common Senſe and Apprehenſion of Mankind: And the Schools may determine the Soul to be Fire, or Air, or Harmony, or what elſe they pleaſe; yet ſtill Nature will make every Man feel that the Grave will not ſecure him from appearing before the great Tribunal to which he is accountable.

So true is this, that, had it not been for Philoſophy, there had remained perhaps no Footſteps of any Unbelievers in this great Article: For the Senſe of Nature would have directed all right; but Philoſophy miſguided many. For thoſe who denied Immortality, did not deny the common Senſe of Nature, which they felt as well as others; but they rejected the Notice, and thought it falſe, becauſe they could not find phyſical Cauſes to ſupport the Belief, or thought that they found phyſical Cauſes effectually to overthrow it. This Account we owe to *Cicero*, one of the beſt Judges of Antiquity; who tells us plainly, That the Reaſon why many rejected the Belief of the Immortality of the Soul, was, becauſe they could not form a Conception of an unbodied Soul. So that Infidelity is of no older a Date than Philoſophy; and a future State was not doubted of, till Men had puzzled and confounded themſelves in their Search after the phyſical Reaſon of the Soul's Immortality. And now conſider how the Caſe ſtands, and how far the Evidence of Nature is weakened by the Authority of ſuch Unbelievers. All Mankind receive the Belief of a future Life, urged to it every Day by what they ſee tranſacted in their own Breaſts: But ſome

Philoſophers reject this Opinion, becauſe they have no Conception of a Soul diſtinct from the Body; as if the Immortality of the Soul depended merely upon the Strength of human Imagination. Were the natural Evidence of Immortality built upon any particular Notion of an human Soul, the Evidence of Nature might be overthrown by ſhewing the Impoſſibility or Improbability of ſuch Notion: But the Evidence of Nature is not concerned in any Notion; and all the common Notions may be falſe, and yet the Evidence of Nature ſtand good, which only ſuppoſes Man to be a rational Creature, and, conſequently, accountable: And if any Philoſopher can prove the contrary, he may then, if his Word will afterwards paſs for any thing, reject this and all other Evidence whatever.

The natural Evidence, I ſay, ſuppoſes only that a Man is a rational, accountable Creature: And, this being the true Foundation in Nature for the Belief of the Immortality, the true Notion of Nature muſt needs be this, That Man, as ſuch, ſhall live to account for his Doings. The Queſtion then, upon the Foot of Nature, is this, What conſtitutes the Man? And whoever obſerves with any Care, will find that this is the Point upon which the Learned of Antiquity divided.

divided. The Vulgar ſpoke of Men after Death juſt in the ſame Manner as they did of Men on Earth: And *Cicero* obſerves, that the common Error (as he calls it) ſo far prevailed, that they ſuppoſed ſuch Things to be tranſacted *apud Inferos, quæ ſine Corporibus nec fieri poſſent, nec intelligi*; which could neither be done, nor conceived to be done, without Bodies. The generality of Men could not arrive to abſtracted Notions of unbodied Spirits: And, though they could not but think that the Body, which was burnt before their Eyes, was diſſipated and deſtroyed; yet ſo great was the Force of Nature, which was ever ſuggeſting to them that Men ſhould live again, that they continued to imagine Men with Bodies in another Life, having no other Notion or Conception of Men.

But with the Learned nothing was held to be more abſurd than to think of having Bodies again in another State: And yet they knew that the true Foundation of Immortality was laid in this Point, That the ſame Individuals ſhould continue. The natural Conſequence then was from theſe Principles to exclude the Body from being any Part of the Man: And all, I believe, who aſſerted an Immortality, agreed in this Notion. The Platoniſts

Platoniſts undoubtedly did; and *Cicero* has every-where declared it to be his Opinion: *Tu habeto*, ſays he, *te non eſſe mortalem, ſed Corpus: Nec enim is es quem Forma iſta declarat; ſed Mens cujuſque is eſt quiſque.* 'Tis not you, but your Body, which is mortal: For you are not what you appear to be; but 'tis the Mind which is the Man. This being the Caſe, the Controverſy was neceſſarily brought to turn upon the Nature of the Soul; and the Belief of Immortality either prevailed or ſunk, according as Men conceived of the natural Dignity and Power of the Soul. For this Reaſon the Corporealiſts rejected the Opinion: For, ſince it was univerſally agreed among the Learned that all that was corporeal of Man died, they, who had no Notion of any thing elſe, neceſſarily concluded that the whole Man died.

From this View you may judge how the Cauſe of Immortality ſtood, and what Difficulties attended it, upon the Foot of Natural Religion. All Men had a natural Senſe and Expectation of a future Life. The Difficulty was to account how the ſame Individuals, which lived and died in this World, and one Part of which evidently went to decay, ſhould live again in another World. The Vulgar, who had no other Notion of a Man

but what came in by their Eyes, ſuppoſed that juſt ſuch Men as lived in this World ſhould live in the next; overlooking the Difficulties which lay in their Way, whilſt they ran haſtily to embrace the Sentiments of Nature. This Advantage they had however, that their Opinion preſerved the Identity of Individuals, and they conceived themſelves to be the very ſame with reſpect to the Life to come, as they found themſelves to be in regard to the Life preſent. But then, had they been preſſed, they could not have ſtood the Difficulties ariſing from the Diſſolution of the Body, the Loſs of which, in their Way of thinking, was the Loſs of the Individual.

The Learned, who could not but ſee and feel this Difficulty, to avoid it, ſhut out the Body from being any Part of the Man, and made the Soul alone to be the perfect Individuum. This engaged them in endleſs Diſputes upon the Nature of the Soul; and this grand Article of Natural Religion by this Means was made to hang by the ſlender Threads of Philoſophy; and the whole was entirely loſt, if their firſt Poſition proved falſe, That the Soul is the whole Man: And 'tis an Aſſertion which will not perhaps ſtand the Examination. The Maintainers of this

Opinion,

Opinion, though they ſuppoſed a ſenſitive as well as a rational Soul in Man, which was the Seat of the Paſſions, and, conſequently, the Spring of all human Actions; yet this ſenſitive Soul they gave up to Death as well as the Body, and preſerved nothing but the pure intellectual Mind. And yet 'tis ſomething ſurprizing to think that a mere rational Mind ſhould be the ſame Individual with a Man, who conſiſts of a rational Mind, a ſenſitive Soul, and a Body. This carries no Probability with it at firſt ſight, and Reaſon cannot undertake much in its behalf.

But, whatever becomes of theſe Speculations, there is a further Difficulty, which can hardly be got over; which is, That this Notion of Immortality and future Judgment can never ſerve the Ends and Purpoſes of Religion, becauſe it is a Notion which the generality of Mankind can never arrive at. Go to the Villages, and tell the Ploughmen, that, if they ſin, yet their Bodies ſhall ſleep in Peace; no material, no ſenſible Fire ſhall ever reach them, but there is ſomething within them purely intellectual which ſhall ſuffer to Eternity; you will hardly find that they have enough of the Intellectual to comprehend your Meaning. Now Natural Religion is founded on the Senſe of Nature;

that

that is, upon the common Apprehenſions of Mankind; and therefore abſtracted metaphyſical Notions, beat out upon the Anvil of the Schools, can never ſupport Natural Religion, or make any Part of it.

In this Point then Nature ſeems to be lame, and not able to ſupport the Hopes of Immortality which ſhe gives to all her Children. The Expectation of the Vulgar, that they ſhall live again, and be juſt the ſame Fleſh and Blood which now they are, is juſtifiable upon no Principles of Reaſon or Nature. What is there in the whole Compaſs of Beings which yields a Similitude of Duſt and Aſhes riſing up again into regular Bodies, and to perpetual Immortality? On the other ſide, that the intellectual Soul ſhould be the whole Man, how juſtifiable ſoever it may be in other Reſpects, yet 'tis not the common Senſe of Nature, and therefore moſt certainly no Part of Natural Religion.

But it may be worth inquiring how Nature comes to be thus defective in this material Point. Did not God intend Men originally for religious Creatures? and, if he did, is it not reaſonable to expect an original and conſiſtent Scheme of Religion? which yet in the Point now before us ſeems to be wanting.

The

The Account of this we cannot learn from Reaſon or Nature; but in the ſacred Hiſtory the Fact is cleared beyond Diſpute. The Abſurdity upon the common Notion of Immortality ariſes from the Diſſolution of the Body at Death; and the great Difficulty upon the Foot of Nature is how to preſerve the Individuals for Judgment which are evidently deſtroyed by Death. Now, if this Death was really a Breach upon the State of Nature, 'tis no wonder it ſhould be a Difficulty in the Religion of Nature; for the Religion of Nature was moſt certainly adapted to the State of Nature. And the wiſe Man tells us, *That God made not Death: For he created all Things that they might have their Being; and the Generations of the World were healthful; and there is no Poiſon of Deſtruction in them; nor the Kingdom of Death upon Earth; for Righteouſneſs is immortal. But ungodly Men with their Works and Words called it to them.* If Immortality was the Condition of the Creation, if Death came in as a Surprize upon Nature, no wonder if ſhe ſtands mute and aſtoniſhed at the fatal Change, and ſeems neither willing to part with her Hopes of Immortality, nor yet able to maintain them. Upon the Plan of Nature the common Notion of Immortality

tality, was the true one: For take Death out of the queſtion, which is the only Separation of Soul and Body that we know any thing of, and there is no Pretence for diſtinguiſhing between the Man and the intellectual Mind. The Vulgar certainly retained the true original Notion of Nature; but, when the original State of Nature was loſt, the Notion grew abſurd; and it could not be otherwiſe. God made Man immortal, and gave him conſiſtent Hopes and Fears: Man made himſelf mortal by Sin: Muſt not then thoſe Hopes, which were conſiſtent Hopes upon the Foot of Immortality, become very abſurd, when joined to a State of Mortality? And thus the Coming in of Death obſcured the Hopes of Immortality.

Laſtly, If we conſider how our Saviour has enlightened this Doctrine, it will appear that he has removed the Difficulty at which Nature ſtumbled. As Death was no Part of the State of Nature, ſo the Difficulties ariſing from it were not provided for in the Religion of Nature. To remove theſe was the proper Work of Revelation: Theſe our Lord has effectually cleared by his Goſpel, and ſhewn us that the Body may and ſhall be united to the Spirit in the Day of the Lord, ſo that the complete Man ſhall ſtand

before

before the great Tribunal to receive a juſt Recompence of Reward for the Things done in the Body. This Account is given in the Words preceding thoſe of the Text: *Who hath aboliſhed Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Goſpel.* Now, if the aboliſhing of Death was the bringing to Light Life and Immortality, it is plain that the Coming in of Death was that which darkened Nature in this great Point of Religion.

There are two Things, as we learn from our Saviour's Anſwer to the *Sadducees*, neceſſary to confirm us in the Belief of a Reſurrection to come; namely, the Knowledge of the Power of God, and of the Will of God: *Do ye not therefore err*, ſays our Lord, *becauſe ye know not the Scriptures, neither the Power of God?* The Scriptures contain the Revelation of the Will of God; and therefore the Words, I reckon, are to be underſtood as if he had ſaid, Ye err, not knowing the Will of God and the Power of God. If we are ſatisfied in theſe two Points, that God both can and will raiſe the Dead, we ſhall want nothing to aſſure us of the Certainty of a Reſurrection. The Power of God we may learn from Reaſon and Nature: For what ſhould make us doubt

but that He, who at the firſt formed Man out of Duſt and Aſhes into a living Soul, ſhould be able to call him into Life again out of the ſame State? But the Goſpel has declared both his Will and his Power, which he confirmed in the raiſing his own Son from the Grave; and better Evidence we could not have for the Poſſibility and Certainty of a Reſurrection. This Evidence of the Goſpel has reinſtated Nature in all her Hopes, confirmed her Right to Immortality, and taught her to triumph over Death and the Grave, which ſeemed before to be unmoveable Bars to all her Expectations. This has reſtored Religion, which had hardly one ſound Foot to ſtand on, and made our Faith and our Reaſon conſiſtent, which were before at too great Diſtance. Nature indeed taught us to hope for Immortality; but it was in ſpight of Senſe and Experience, till the great Prince of our Peace appeared, *who brought Life and Immortality to Light through his Goſpel.*

DISCOURSE VII.

ROMANS iv. 25.

Who was delivered for our Offences, and was raiſed again for our Juſtification.

THE Manner of Expreſſion here uſed is different from what is generally to be met with in other Parts of the New Teſtament upon the like Occaſion. Here we are told that Chriſt was *delivered* for our *Offences*, and *raiſed* for our *Juſtification*; as if the Remiſſion of our Sins was to be aſcribed peculiarly to the Paſſion, and our Juſtification in the Sight of God to the Reſurrection of Chriſt: Whereas in the Chapter before this, Ver. 25, the Apoſtle tells us in general, that God hath ſet forth Chriſt to be a Propitiation *through Faith in*

his Blood; and in Ch. v. Ver. 9, particularly and expreſly, *that, being juſtified by his Blood, we ſhall be ſaved from Wrath through him*; and Ver. 10, *that we are reconciled to God by the Death of his Son.* In the twentieth of the *Acts*, the Apoſtle, in his Exhortation to the Elders of the Church, warns them *to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchaſed with his own Blood*, Ver. 28. To the ſame Purpoſe both St. *Peter* and St. *John* ſpeak; the one telling us, *that the Blood of Jeſus Chriſt cleanſeth us from all Sin*, 1 John i. 7; the other, that we have been redeemed *with the precious Blood of Chriſt, as of a Lamb without Blemiſh and without Spot*, 1 Pet. i. 19.

It is the conſtant Tenor of Scripture, that Atonement for the Sins of the World was made by our great High-Prieſt upon the Croſs; that his Death was our Redemption, and his Blood the Price paid for us. So that, when we conſider the Redemption (which includes our Juſtification) with reſpect to Chriſt, the Author and Finiſher of it, it muſt be aſcribed to his Death and Paſſion: But, as to ourſelves, our Title and Intereſt in this common Salvation being grounded on Faith, our Juſtification, though purchaſed by the Blood of Chriſt, muſt be appropriated

to

ourſelves through Faith in that Blood: For the ſame Apoſtle who has told us that we are *juſtified freely through the Redemption which is in Chriſt Jeſus*, hath likewiſe told us *that God hath ſet him forth to be a Propitiation through Faith in his Blood.* For this Reaſon we are ſaid to be juſtified by Faith; not that our Faith is the Purchaſe of Juſtification, which we owe to the Blood of Chriſt alone; but becauſe through Faith we obtain the Benefit of the Redemption wrought by Chriſt Jeſus. Now, though the Death of Chriſt was the reconciling of the World to God, yet the Reſurrection of Chriſt is the great and ſolid Foundation of our Hope and Faith in him, even of our Faith in his Blood, by which he made the Propitiation for our Sins: And therefore, although Chriſt died for our Offences, and by his precious Blood made Atonement for our Sins; yet, ſince our Faith in his Death, our Hope in his Blood, by which Hope and Faith we are juſtified, are built upon the Truth and Credit of his Reſurrection, it is very properly ſaid, that *he roſe again for our Juſtification:* For the Death of Chriſt would have been no Juſtification to us, nor could we have had Hope or Faith in it, but for the Power and Glory of the Reſurrection;

which has wiped away the Scandal and Ignominy of the Croſs, and made it a rational Act of Faith to hope for Life and Immortality from Him, who himſelf once died upon the Tree.

For the Truth of this Expoſition I appeal to St. *Paul*, who, 1 *Cor.* xv. 17, has told us, *that, if Chriſt be not riſen, our Faith is vain; we are yet in our Sins.* So that Faith in the Death of Chriſt, not grounded on the Aſſurance of his Reſurrection, is a vain Faith, and ſuch an one as cannot deliver us from our Sins. Nay, that the Death of Chriſt could not have been a Propitiation for Sin without his Reſurrection, he expreſly teaches in the next Verſe, ſaying, that, *if Chriſt be not raiſed, then they alſo, which are fallen aſleep in Chriſt, are periſhed.*

The Power of the Reſurrection, together with the Atonement for Sin made by the Death of Chriſt, is very beautifully expreſſed by St. *Paul*, *Rom.* viii. 34: *Who is he that condemneth? It is Chriſt that died, yea rather that is riſen again, who is even at the right Hand of God, who alſo maketh Interceſſion for us.* The Death of Chriſt freed us from Condemnation; but then was our Freedom made manifeſt, when he came from the Grave in Triumph, and led Captivity captive;

when he aſcended to the right Hand of his Father to be our perpetual High-Prieſt and Mediator: For, as the Apoſtle argues, *if, when we were Enemies, we were reconciled to God by the Death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, ſhall we be ſaved by his Life*; i. e. by his Reſurrection to Life and to Glory.

This Account, as it gives the true Interpretation of the Text, ſo likewiſe does it ſhew of what great Moment the Reſurrection of our Lord was, which was to be the Baſis and Support of the whole Chriſtian Inſtitution, and the Ground of our Hope and Faith in him. That Chriſt died the Death of a common Malefactor after a Life ſpent in Innocency, and a conſtant and laborious Teaching of the great Duties of Religion and Morality, was but common to him, and others before him, whom God had raiſed up to be ſhining Lights of the World. Thus the Prophets of old were perſecuted and deſtroyed by ſundry kinds of Death: But in their Blood there was no Expiation for Sin: The Blood of *Abel* and of the Prophets ſpoke no ſuch Language, but cried to God for Vengeance againſt a cruel and a guilty World. Had Chriſt died like one of them, and been no more heard of, how ſhould we have believed that his Death had atoned for

all the reſt of the Blood that had been ſpilt from the Foundation of the World? or that the whole Earth had obtained Remiſſion of Sin from God by deſtroying one more, and him the greateſt of all the Prophets, in the moſt cruel Manner? But, when our Lord roſe from the Grave, and brought back with him the Pardon which he had ſealed with his own Blood; when, inſtead of executing Wrath upon his Enemies, he ſent again the Offer of Peace and Reconciliation, and took upon himſelf to be their Mediator and Interceſſor, as he had already been their Sacrifice; what Room was there to doubt of the Efficacy of his Death, the Efficacy of which was ſo undeniably confirmed by his Reſurrection? or what Reaſon to miſtruſt the Salvation he offered others, when, by ſaving himſelf from the Power of Death, he had given the fulleſt Evidence how able he was to ſave others alſo? The moſt incredulous of his Enemies deſired him only *to come down from the Croſs, and they would believe him:* But how much better Reaſon had they to believe him, when he came, not from the Croſs, but from the Grave, which was by much the ſurer Hold, and from which before no Mortal had ever eſcaped! How undeniable was this Teſtimony of God's

Love

Love to Mankind, that, after the ill Reception his Son had found among them, after all the cruel Uſage he had experienced, and the ignominious Death he had ſuffered, he yet ſent him once more from the Grave to convince Unbelievers, and to proclaim and confirm the Pardon he had purchaſed for them!

His firſt Coming was attended with a mean Birth and narrow Fortune, his Education was ſuitable to his Condition, and the greateſt Part of his Life ſpent in Obſcurity: *He had no Form or Comelineſs that we ſhould deſire him; he was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief:* And, when he fell a Victim to the Malice and Rage of the People, his beſt Friends, the conſtant Companions of his Sorrow, gave him over for loſt; *they eſteemed him ſtricken and ſmitten of God:* All their Hopes died with him, and the Remembrance of his Miracles and mighty Works was buried in the ſame Tomb with himſelf; and nothing leſs was thought of, than that *this was he who ſhould redeem Iſrael from all his Sins.* But, when he came again from the Boſom of the Earth, having ſubdued the Powers of Darkneſs and of Death, then was he declared to be the Son of God with Power; and the Glory as of the only-

begotten

begotten Son of God ſhone clearly through the Veil of Fleſh which had ſo long obſcured it. And from thenceforth our Faith has ſtood, not in the Words which the Wiſdom or Cunning of Man teacheth, but in the Power and Demonſtration of the Spirit of Life: And we can with Aſſurance ſay, *We know in whom we have truſted*, expecting Life and Salvation from Him alone, who is the Lord of Life and Glory. But, after all, if the Reſurrection of Chriſt is the Support of all other Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, how is itſelf ſupported? To our common Apprehenſion nothing more incredible than that a Man dead and buried ſhould be reſtored to Life again.

To go into the Particulars of the Evidence of this great Event, recorded in Scripture and the oldeſt Writers of the Church, would open too large a Field of Diſcourſe at preſent: And indeed there are ſome Objections which naturally ariſe in the Minds of Men, which ought previouſly to that Inquiry to be removed; for the great Difficulty at which Men ſtick, does not ariſe ſo much from the Nature of the Evidence we propoſe, as from the Nature of the Thing itſelf. The Preſumptions againſt the Poſſibility of a Reſurrection operate ſo ſtrongly in the Minds of ſome,

ſome, that they think it needleſs to inquire what Evidence there is for it, being perſuaded that the Thing itſelf is not capable of being ſupported by any Evidence. This Prejudice was a very early one; for the Apoſtle expoſtulates this Caſe with the *Corinthians*, *Why ſhould it be thought a Thing incredible with you that God ſhould raiſe the Dead?*

Let us conſider the Force of this Expoſtulation, and ſee whether it is ſtrong enough to encounter the Prejudice.

Now, nothing can be ſaid to be incredible, if there is a Power in any Perſon able to effect it; for, if there is ſuch a Power, that Power may bring into Exiſtence that very Thing which you doubt of; and it cannot be incredible that a Thing ſhould exiſt, which may poſſibly really exiſt. If we conſider only the Strength of Children, it is incredible that they ſhould build Caſtles; but, if we conſider the Strength and Ability of Men, it would be ridiculous to doubt whether they could, or no. So that the Credibility or Incredibility of any thing depends on knowing whether there is, or is not, a Power adequate to the Undertaking. The Reſurrection of the Dead is in truth a very ſtupendous Work: But neither you nor I am to undertake it: If it depended on us, it

it would be incredible indeed. It is the Work of God, and of Him only: And ſurely I have named One of Credit and Power ſufficient to be truſted in this great Affair. And this is St. *Paul*'s Argument, Why ſhould it be thought incredible *that God ſhould raiſe the Dead?* Whoever therefore affirms that a Reſurrection is in itſelf a Thing incredible, muſt affirm that it is incredible that God has Power to raiſe the Dead. And now conſider who it is that can conſiſtently with the common and allowed Principles of Reaſon and Nature deny this Power to God. No one certainly, who admits that God made the World, can entertain this Doubt: For, if God has given us the Life we now enjoy, what ſhould hinder him from reſtoring Life again, after this is loſt? Can there be more Difficulty in giving Life the ſecond Time, than there was at firſt? If there be any Contradiction therefore in the Notion of a Reſurrection, there muſt be the very ſame in the Notion of Creation. And therefore Natural Religion is juſt as much concerned in this Point as Revelation: For, though the Belief of the Fact, that the Dead ſhall be raiſed, depends on Revelation; yet our Belief that God has Power to raiſe the Dead depends not on Revelation,

Revelation, but on the clear Dictates of Reaſon, of that Reaſon by which we diſcover him to be our Creator. And, if you doubt even of this his Power of Creation, you muſt bid adieu to all Religion at once: For, if God created not the World, how are you at all related to him? If he did not make us, what Right he has to govern us, or what Pretence to our Obedience, neither you from Nature, nor we from Revelation, can ever be ſatisfied.

The Power of God being admitted to be equal to this Work, the Queſtion of the Reſurrection of Chriſt comes to be a Queſtion of Fact: And, though I propoſe not to enter into the Evidence of the Fact, yet it may be proper to obſerve, That a Reſurrection, conſidered as a Fact, is a Fact as capable of Evidence as any whatever; it is an Object of Senſe, of every Senſe by which we judge of the Reality of Things without us.

We are told, *that Chriſt died, and roſe again.* Of his Death, I ſuppoſe, there is no great Doubt: Die he certainly did: And ſurely there could be no more Difficulty to ſee and know that he was dead, than in knowing when others were dead, from *Adam* to this Day. One would think therefore, that

that thoſe about him, who ſaw him crucified and buried, might be truſted when they report that he died.

But he came to Life again: Very true; and it was very eaſy for thoſe who converſed with him to know whether he was alive, or no. There was no more Difficulty in judging of his being alive, than of judging, in any other Caſe, whether thoſe we converſe with are alive, or no. His having been dead and buried could not poſſibly alter the Caſe, or create any Difficulty in judging whether he was really alive, or no. So that the Reſurrection, conſidered as a Fact, was in every Part of it an Object of Senſe, and as capable of being well atteſted as any other Object of Senſe whatever. Lay theſe Things together, the Promiſe of God to give us Life eternal, his Power to make good his Word, the Confirmation he has given us of our Hope by the Reſurrection of Chriſt; and what is wanting to make the Belief of this Article a rational Act of Faith?

The Promiſes of God have never borrowed Help from moral Probabilities. The Promiſes to *Abraham* were not of this kind; ſo far otherwiſe, that it is ſaid of him, that, *againſt Hope, he believed in Hope*; that is, he hoped, where, humanly ſpeaking, there was no

no Ground for Hope. There was no Probability that his Seed, who was a Stranger and Pilgrim on Earth, ſhould inherit the Land of *Canaan*, poſſeſſed by great and powerful Nations.

The Promiſe of a Son to him, when he and his Wife were both too far advanced in Years to expect one in the ordinary Courſe of Nature, was contrary to Experience and to natural Probability. But what ſays the Apoſtle? Abraham, *not being weak in Faith, conſidered not his own Body, now dead, when he was about an hundred Years old, neither yet the Deadneſs of* Sarah's *Womb.* — *But he ſtaggered not at the Promiſe of God,* — *being fully perſuaded that what he had promiſed he was able to perform.* This Reliance on the Promiſes of God, againſt all the Preſumptions of human Experience and Probability, was the very Thing, as St. *Paul* tells us, that *was imputed to him for Righteouſneſs.*

Compare now this Caſe with the Caſe of Chriſtians. We have great Promiſes made to us by God in Chriſt Jeſus, the Promiſes of a Reſurrection to Life. Inquire of the World; they know of no ſuch Thing, the Ages paſt have afforded no Inſtance of this kind, and, as far as they can ſee and judge, daily Experience is a Witneſs againſt this Hope.

Under

Under theſe Difficulties, whither ſhall we go for Refuge and Support? whither! but to the Promiſes of God, and to this full Perſuaſion, *That what he has promiſed he is able to perform.* If we hold faſt this Perſuaſion, and ſtagger not through Unbelief, then ſhall we indeed be the Children of the Faith of *Abraham*, whoſe *Faith was imputed to him for Righteouſneſs:* For, as St. *Paul* tells us, this Teſtimony of *Abraham*'s Faith *was not written for his ſake alone, but for us alſo, to whom it ſhall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raiſed up Jeſus our Lord from the Dead.* Here then is the great Article of Chriſtian Faith, even of that Faith which will be imputed to us for Righteouſneſs: It is a firm Confidence and Reliance upon God, under this peculiar Character, That he is the Raiſer-up of the Dead, and will, according to his Promiſe, raiſe us to Life eternal.

For the Confirmation of this Hope and Faith God raiſed his own Son from the Grave; who for that Reaſon is ſaid to be raiſed for *our Juſtification*, ſince upon the Authority and Credit of his Reſurrection depends that great Article of Faith by which alone we are to be juſtified.

As the bleſſed Fruit of this Faith is to all true Believers Life and Immortality, ſo it

highly concerns us to conſider what the Event of Unbelief muſt be. Many would perhaps content themſelves without the Hopes of Glory and future Happineſs, if that was all. But that is not all: *For the Dead ſhall be raiſed*, whether you like it, or like it not; *all who are in the Grave ſhall come forth*, ſome to Life, ſome to Condemnation, according to the Things done in the Body. Nothing can ſecure to us more effectually an happy State in Futurity, than a conſtant and ſteddy Belief and Expectation of the Reſurrection of the Dead. This will convince us that what we are now doing are not ſuch trifling Things as to be ſoon forgotten, or attended with Conſequences only for to-day or to-morrow; but they are Things long to be remembered, Things noted down in God's Book, and will be expoſed to View at the great Day in the Preſence of Men and of Angels, and be attended with Conſequences through all the Ages of Eternity, to our great Honour and Happineſs, or to our great Confuſion and Miſery.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ROMANS viii. 16.

The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.

TO be the Children of God is the greateſt Privilege under the Goſpel, and, conſequently, implies in it all the Advantages that belong to, and all the Qualities neceſſary to make, a good Chriſtian. Thus our Apoſtle argues: *If Children, then Heirs; Heirs of God, and Joint-heirs with Chriſt.* As this is a new State, which belongs not to us by Nature, ſo our Entrance into it is ſtyled a new Birth; and we are ſaid *to be born again*, and *to be begotten again*, to theſe Hopes: He, from whom we receive theſe Hopes, is the Father that begets us, and his

Children we are: And therefore, as we receive our ſpiritual Life from the Gift and Mercy of God, he is our Father, and we are his Children. Thus St. *Peter* tells us, *that we are born again, not of corruptible Seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*, 1 Pet. i. 23. This new Life we receive by the Miniſtration of the Spirit: The Powers which belong to this Life, and in which it conſiſts, depend upon the Influences of the Spirit: And therefore we are ſaid *to be born of the Spirit*. He is the Earneſt of our Inheritance, the Pledge and Security which we receive from God of our future Immortality: Our Right of Inheritance depends upon the Relation we bear to God of Sons and Children: And therefore the Spirit of Adoption, by which we are born to God, is the Pledge and Security of our Inheritance, as he is ſtyled by our Apoſtle.

But the Difficulty is, how to make the firſt Step, and to know aſſuredly that we are the Children of God. When once we are ſure of this, it will not be hard to believe that God will provide for his own Children, and ſecure to them an Inheritance that fadeth not away. And here the Apoſtle tells us, *that*

that the Spirit itſelf, that is, the ſame Spirit by which we are made Children, *beareth witneſs with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* 'Tis Matter of great Diſpute, what ſort of Evidence the Apoſtle here means, and what kind of Certainty ariſes from it. Some have placed this Evidence among the Gifts of the Spirit, and ſuppoſed it to be given on purpoſe to aſſure the Elect of the Certainty of their Salvation. Others maintain, That no Man, unleſs it be ſpecially revealed to him by God, can ever know that he is in a State of Security in this Life: And this Opinion was received and confirmed by the Council of *Trent*, as may be ſeen at large in the ſixth Seſſion. It will not be worth my Pains or your Patience to enter into the Niceties of this Controverſy: And therefore I ſhall confine myſelf to St. *Paul*, and endeavour to ſhew you his Meaning in the Text, which will go a great way towards giving us right Notions and Apprehenſions in this Matter. In order to this, I propoſe three Things to be conſidered:

Firſt, How many Witneſſes St. *Paul* points out to us in the Text, and who they are.

Secondly, What kind of Evidence each of them gives in this Caſe.

Thirdly, What the Reſult of their Evidence is, and with what kind of Certainty we know *that we are the Children of God*.

First, We are to conſider how many Witneſſes St. *Paul* points out to us in the Text, and who they are. As our Tranſlators have repreſented St. *Paul*'s Meaning, there is no Room for Diſpute concerning the Number of the Witneſſes, which are evidently two: *The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our Spirit*: The Spirit itſelf, that is, the Spirit of Adoption, which Chriſtians receive, is one Witneſs; and our own Spirit is the other Witneſs. But the vulgar *Latin*, and ſeveral other Tranſlators, render the Words to this Effect: *The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs to our Spirit*. According to this Senſe, which is maintained by *Grotius* and *Crellius*, and ſome others, there is but one Witneſs, the Spirit of Adoption, who bears evidence to our Spirit. But the Words in the Original evidently imply the Senſe which our Tranſlators follow: Αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν. Συμμαρτυρεῖν ſignifies to be a Fellow-witneſs, or to witneſs the ſame Thing that another does: And ſo the Word conſtantly ſignifies in Scripture, and is never uſed but where there is a concurrent Evidence of two Witneſſes. We meet with the ſame Word in

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Rom. ii. 15. *Which ſhew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Conſcience alſo bearing witneſs, and their Thoughts the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another.* And to this Place *Grotius* ſends us, to ſhew that the Word is uſed of one ſingle Witneſs only; as here the Conſcience only is ſaid to bear witneſs. But a little Attention will ſhew us in this Place another Witneſs: The Apoſtle proves from the Evidence of Conſcience, that the Gentiles had the Work or Matter of the Law written in their Hearts: The Law teſtifies to Men what is good, and what is evil: If Conſcience teſtifies the ſame Thing to be good and juſt which the Law does, then Conſcience proves the Matter of the Law to be written in the Heart; if it teſtifies any thing elſe, ſo be it: But no other Evidence will prove the Apoſtle's Aſſertion, that the Gentiles have the Work of the Law written in their Heart. And therefore the Apoſtle's Argument ſtands thus: The Gentiles ſhew the Work of the Law to be written in their Heart by the Teſtimony of their Conſcience, which agrees with the Teſtimony of the Law; their Conſcience and the Law both allowing and forbidding the ſame Thing. So that the Apoſtle's Argument plainly ſuppoſes the concurrent Evidence of the Law

and of Conſcience. And therefore even here the Word συμμαρτυρεῖν points out two Witneſſes to us. The ſame Word is uſed by St. *Paul* in the firſt Verſe of the ninth Chapter of the *Romans*: *I ſay the Truth in Chriſt, I lye not, my Conſcience alſo bearing me witneſs,* συμμαρτυρούσης μοι. But here evidently are two Witneſſes to the ſame Thing. When a Man does not ſpeak the Truth, 'tis certain that he witneſſes one Thing, and his Conſcience witneſſes another, and are therefore two diſtinct Witneſſes: So are they likewiſe when a Man ſpeaks Truth; for the ſame Evidence will not make two Witneſſes to be one Witneſs. And therefore here alſo there are two Witneſſes; St. *Paul*, who witneſſed his Affection to his Countrymen, and his Conſcience, which witneſſed for his Sincerity. The Word is uſed but once more in the New Teſtament, and that is in the laſt Chapter of the *Revelations*; and there it is uſed with reſpect to a Teſtimony, in which Chriſt, and his Angel whom he ſent to the Churches, and even St. *John*, were concerned. So that the Word is every-where uſed of the concurrent Evidence of two or more Witneſſes. And, this being the conſtant Uſe of the Word, there can be no Reaſon given why it ſhould not be taken in

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the ſame Senſe here, and rendered, *The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs*, not *to*, but *with*, or *together with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* Here then are two Witneſſes; and who they are, is next to be conſidered.

Who the firſt Spirit is, muſt be learnt from what goes before. In the ſecond Verſe of this Chapter we read of *the Spirit of Life in Chriſt Jeſus, which hath made us free from the Law of Sin and of Death:* In the ninth Verſe he is called *the Spirit of God and of Chriſt*; in the eleventh Verſe, *the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the Dead*; in the fifteenth Verſe, *the Spirit of Adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father.* In the Verſe of the Text Reference is had to this Spirit: *The Spirit itſelf*, that is, the Spirit which has made us free in Chriſt Jeſus, the Spirit by which we have received Adoption, does itſelf bear witneſs with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God. But the Queſtion then is, whether Spirit in all theſe Places be the Name of a Perſon, or whether it denotes only a Quality and Temper belonging to Chriſtians; ſo that the Spirit of Chriſt ſhall ſignify no more than the Mind of Chriſt does in another Place, *Let the ſame Mind be in you which was in Chriſt Jeſus*; that is, the ſame Temper and Diſpoſition.

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This Senſe *Crellius* maintains, and others after him; and thus he explains the Text: Our Evangelical Spirit, that is, as he explains himſelf in another Place, our Evangelical Temper, is a ſufficient Argument to our own Minds that we are the Children of God. I mean not to diſpute this Point with *Crellius*, and his Brethren, the Socinians; which would be to run into a great Controverſy: But, ſince the Spirit of Chriſt may and does ſometimes ſignify both Ways, I ſhall endeavour to point out to ſuch as have no private Prejudices to be maintained, which Senſe is here to be followed. Firſt then, This Spirit is the Spirit of Life, by which we are made free; that is, by which we are regenerated in Chriſt Jeſus, and ſet at Liberty from the heavy Yoke of Sin, which the Apoſtle had been deſcribing in the foregoing Chapter. Now, an Evangelical Temper is not the Cauſe, but the Conſequent of this Freedom. The Spirit of God is the efficient Cauſe; of whom we are ſaid, for that Reaſon, to be born. Secondly, 'Tis the Spirit of him who raiſed up Chriſt; that is, the Spirit by which he wrought that great Wonder and Miracle, as is evident by taking the whole eleventh Verſe together: *If the Spirit of him who raiſed up Jeſus from the Dead dwell in you, he that*

raiſed up Chriſt from the Dead ſhall alſo quicken your mortal Bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. So that the Spirit of him who raiſed Chriſt from the Dead, is the Spirit *by which* he raiſed Chriſt from the Dead; that is, the Holy Spirit, who is mighty in Works and Wonders. Laſtly, 'Tis the Spirit of Adoption, by which we are made Sons: The Spirit of Adoption is the Spirit of which we are born in Chriſt; of which Birth an Evangelical Temper is not the Cauſe, but the Effect. So that, by the whole Tenor of the Apoſtle's Arguing, it appears, that the Spirit which beareth witneſs with our Spirit, is the Holy Spirit of God, which works together with our Spirit to enable us to perform the juſt and holy Will of God. As to the ſecond Witneſs, our own Spirit, I need not ſpend much Time to tell you who it is, ſince moſt are agreed that it is our own Mind. *Who knoweth the Things of a Man, ſave the Spirit of a Man which is in him?* that is, ſave his Mind and Conſcience. So then the faithful Chriſtian has two Witneſſes of his being the Son of God; the Holy Spirit of God, and his own Mind and Conſcience.

Let us therefore, in the ſecond Place, inquire, what Evidence each of them gives in this

this Caſe. In order to this, we muſt look back to the latter Part of the foregoing Chapter, to which this Verſe of the Text relates: For in all this eighth Chapter there is not one Word ſaid before of our own Mind or Spirit, nor the leaſt Hint of any Evidence that it gives of our being the Children of God. Our crying Abba, Father, in the fifteenth Verſe, is very improperly pitched upon by ſome as the Evidence proceeding from our own Mind; ſince 'tis ſaid expreſly, that we cry Abba, Father, by the Spirit of Adoption: So that our crying Abba, Father, is an Evidence coming not from our own Minds, but from the Holy Spirit. The Power to do Good comes from the Influence of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the Good we do is ſuch an Evidence of our being the Sons of God, as we ſtand obliged to the Spirit of God for: *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God*, Ver. 14. To be led by the Spirit, is *through the Spirit to mortify the Deeds of the Fleſh*, Ver. 13. So that our Victory over the Fleſh is the Effect of our having the Holy Spirit to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen us, and is conſequently, as it is a great Evidence and Aſſurance to us of our being the Children of God, the Evidence of that Spirit from whence it proceeds;

that is, not our own Spirit, but the Spirit of God. So that the great Privileges mentioned in this Chapter, ſuch as being made free from the Law of Sin and Death, of walking not after the Fleſh, but the Spirit, being ſuch as we receive from the Spirit of God, are therefore Evidences of the Spirit for our Regeneration.

But where then muſt we look for the Evidence of our own Spirit? ſince all the Marks and Signs of Regeneration mentioned in this eighth Chapter manifeſtly belong to the Evidence of the Holy Spirit. This Difficulty put the *Greek* Commentators upon a very forced Interpretation of this Place; for, obſerving that all the Signs of Adoption mentioned by the Apoſtle proceeded from the Power and Working of the Holy Spirit, in effect they made the two Witneſſes of the Text but one. Thus *Chryſoſtom* by the Spirit itſelf underſtands the Holy Spirit; and by our Spirit he underſtands the Gift of the Holy Spirit within us: "What is this?" ſays he: "*The Spirit* "*beareth witneſs with our Spirit.*" To which he anſwers, "The Comforter beareth wit-"neſs to the Gift beſtowed on us; for the "Voice, that is, of crying Abba, Father, "belongs not only to the Gift or Grace, "but

" but likewiſe to the Spirit who beſtows
" the Grace." The Gifts of the Spirit are ſometimes called by the Name of Spirit. The Gift of Prophecy is ſtyled the Spirit of Prophecy. But I do not remember that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are ever ſtyled *our Spirit* in ſacred Writ. Beſides, as I obſerved before, this reduces the two Witneſſes to one; for how does the Spirit bear witneſs but by the Gifts and Graces beſtowed on us? and, if ſo, then the Evidence of the Gift, and the Evidence of the Spirit, are one and the ſame Evidence.

Keeping therefore to the Senſe already laid down, let us conſider what St. *Paul* had in his View when he penned the Place now before us. Thoſe who are converſant in St. *Paul*'s Writings need not be told that they muſt not always ſearch for the Connection within a Verſe or two of what they read. The Apoſtle often looks back to what went before at ſome Diſtance, and, after a long Chain of Conſequences, returns to his Point without giving his Reader Notice. This might be made plain by Inſtances, were it our Buſineſs at preſent to examine the Manner or Way of St. *Paul*'s Writing. But as to the Place before us: In the latter Part of the ſeventh Chapter St.

St. *Paul* deſcribes the State of an unregenerate *Jew*, or Heathen; for what he ſays equally belongs to both. This he does in order to ſhew them the Neceſſity of Redemption through Chriſt, inaſmuch as neither the Law of *Moſes*, nor of Nature, could free them from the Power and Dominion of Sin, nor, conſequently, from Death, which ever follows cloſe at the Heels of Sin. That this was the Apoſtle's Intent, appears from the Lamentation he makes over the State of Nature, and the Remedy he immediately propoſes of Faith through Chriſt: *O wretched Man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the Body of this Death! I thank God through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* And then in this eighth Chapter he ſets forth the Power of Redemption, ſhewing, in every Part, how it ſupplies the Weakneſſes and Infirmities both of the Law and of Nature. The unregenerate Man *was brought into Captivity to the Law of Sin*, Chap. vii. 23. *But the Law of the Spirit of Life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made us free from the Law of Sin and of Death*, Ver. 2. In the unregenerate Man *there dwelleth no good Thing*, Ver. 18: But in the Chriſtian *dwelleth the Spirit of Chriſt*, Ver. 9. So that the Apoſtle's main Deſign here,

here is, I think, pretty evident. But, to clear the Matter before us, we muſt more particularly examine what he ſays of the unregenerate Man's Condition. He deſcribes him as under the moſt wretched Slavery, obeying Sin, with the greateſt Reluctance to his own Mind and Reaſon: *That which I do, I allow not: For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.* Ver. 15. His Mind he allows to be uncorrupted, and to ſtand firm to the Law of God, approving the Things which are good; but then the Luſts and Appetites of the Fleſh are too ſtrong for it, and force it into the Obedience of the Law of Sin, which it hates and condemns: *I find a Law*, ſays he, *that, when I would do Good, Evil is preſent with me: For I delight in the Law of God after the inward Man. But I ſee another Law in my Members, warring againſt the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members;* Ver. 21, 22, 23. See then the divided Empire of Sin and Reaſon: Reaſon approves what is juſt and holy, conſents to, and delights in the Law of God; but Sin captivates and enthrals it, and makes the Man the Slave of Sin, though the Admirer and

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Approver of Virtue. The Upſhot of the whole Matter is, as St. *Paul* in the laſt Verſe expreſſes it, *With the Mind*, or Spirit, *I ſerve the Law of God, but with the Fleſh the Law of Sin*. And now conſider what Aſſiſtance this Condition requires: The Man's Spirit is right and pure; it loves, it delights in, it approves the Law of God; and, could he follow the Dictates of his Reaſon, and obey the Law of God as well as love it, and practiſe Holineſs as well as approve it, he would want no other Evidence of his being the Son and Servant of God: *His Servants ye are*, ſays the Apoſtle, *to whom ye obey*. The Man who is taken captive, and carried into Slavery, obeys by Force his Tyrant's Law; but he loves his own Country and King, and longs to come under the Obedience of his natural Prince again. As to his own Mind, he knows whoſe Subject he is, and would be; but outward Neceſſity ſhews him that he is a Slave by the conſtrained Obedience he yields to the foreign Law. Take off Force, and the Man's own Inclinations will return him ſoon to his natural Obedience. And this is not unlike the Caſe St. *Paul* puts the unregenerate Man in: He loves God, and his Law; but he obeys the Tyrant, Sin. Deſtroy the Power

of Sin, and Reaſon will return him to the Obedience of God, and ſoon ſhew whoſe true Son and Servant he is. So that the Evidence of Reaſon, even in the State of Nature, ſhews us that we are the Servants and Sons of God: But Power conſtrains us, Luſt and Appetite rule over us, and woful Experience ſhews us that we are the Slaves of Sin. Now, to complete this Evidence of our Minds, and to render it convincing to ourſelves and others, that we are indeed the Children of God, what more is wanting, than to deſtroy the Power of Sin, and to give us up to follow the Dictates of Reaſon in obeying the juſt Laws and Commands of God? For this is a complete Evidence that any Man is the Son and Servant of God, that he loves him, that he obeys him, and keeps his Commandments. You ſee then what the Evidence of our own Spirit is: It loves and delights in the Law of God, and is reſtleſs to obey the Law it loves: *With the Mind I ſerve the Law of God, but with the Fleſh the Law of Sin:* Which Words I deſire you to bear in your Memory, whilſt I ſet forth to you the Evidence of the Spirit of God.

In the eighth Chapter St. *Paul* tells us, that the Redemption by Chriſt Jeſus has put

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an End to the wretched Captivity we lived under: *The Law of the Spirit of Life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death.* Law here ſignifies Power; for Power is a Law to thoſe who live under it. Now then the Power of the Spirit has deſtroyed the Power of Sin. The Power of Sin was oppoſite to the Mind and Reaſon of Man; ſo that Man, whilſt he lived under that Power, was a Slave. But the Power of the Spirit is on Reaſon's Side, and works together with it; ſo that to be under this Power is a State of Freedom and Liberty: And therefore 'tis juſtly ſaid, that the Law of the Spirit of Life hath made us free. The Conſequence of our being under the Power of the Spirit is, *that we walk not after the Fleſh, but the Spirit,* Ver. 4; *that we mind the Things of the Spirit,* Ver. 5; *that we mortify the Deeds of the Body,* Ver. 13; *that we are the Sons of God,* Ver. 14; *that we cry Abba, Father,* Ver. 15. Theſe are the Fruits of the Spirit. Now, to walk after the Spirit, and to do the Deeds of the Spirit, is to walk according to our own Mind and Reaſon; for Reaſon approved the Things of God, and the Things of the Spirit are the Things of God. To cry Abba, Father, proceeds from a ſettled and undiſturbed Mind,

from filial Duty and Reverence. Children, who live in Diſobedience to their Parents, are not apt to meet them with theſe endearing Expreſſions: But, when the Child loves, and is under no Rebukes of Conſcience for Miſbehaviour towards his Parent, he meets him with theſe Words of Love and of Confidence. This therefore we owe to the Spirit: For before, however our Minds conſented to his Laws, yet ſtill we were Sinners, and Conſcience ſtood between us and our Father; ſo that we could not approach without Fear and Trembling, our Minds ſtill repreſenting him to us rather as an injured Lord, than as a tender Father. But, ſince the Power of the Spirit has ſtilled the horrid Conteſt that was in us between Reaſon and Sin, and that we both love and obey him, we now no longer fear his Preſence; but, like Children longing for the Return of a kind Father, we run out to embrace him, with Words of Friendſhip and Affection in our Mouths, crying Abba, Father: And by this Means, ſays St. *Paul*, *the Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God. With the Mind*, ſays the Apoſtle before, *I ſerve the Law of God:* And now, ſays he, by the Spirit you obey the ſame Law; and the Spirit of God and your Spirit agree to give

give you the utmoſt Aſſurance of being the Children of God. You are no longer in the ſad Condition before deſcribed, the Mind leaning one Way, and the Fleſh another; ſo that you deſired to do one Thing, but yet did the contrary, and were always reſtleſs and uneaſy, rebuked within, and conſtrained without: For the Spirit, by which you are now ruled, conſents to your Mind, and is bent to perform the ſame Things which the Mind approves; from whence you may have the greateſt Confidence towards God: For what more perfect Obedience can there be, than that to which both outward and inward Man conſent? or what plainer Signs can you have of a good Son and Servant, than to know that he loves the Law of his Father, and obeys it? Love the Law indeed you did before; but obey it you could not: But now by the Spirit you obey it, and have the greateſt Satisfaction, both from within and without, that you are the Children of God. This may ſuffice to ſhew the Apoſtle's Meaning, and to explain the Nature of the Evidence which each Spirit gives.

We muſt now, in the laſt Place, conſider, what the Reſult of this Evidence is, and with what kind of Certainty we may know that we are the Children of God.

And firſt, you muſt take notice, that theſe two Evidences ſtrengthen and ſupport each other, and muſt both meet to give us the Aſſurance we expect. We muſt have the Evidence of our own Spirit that we do indeed love and approve the Law of God; and we muſt have the Evidence of the Spirit of God working in us by Obedience: And, when we both love and obey the Commands of God, we want nothing farther to aſſure us that we are the Children of God; but, where either of theſe is wanting, the Evidence of the other avails nothing. If you love and approve the Command, but do not obey, you are ſelf-condemned, you are in your Sins; Luſt has Dominion over you, and not the Spirit of God. If you obey the Law, and conform outwardly to it, but do not love and like it, you are an Hypocrite, no Servant of God, but of the World; and your outward Compliance is fleſhly Wiſdom, and not the Work of the Spirit.

So then you have two Ways of judging yourſelves, which muſt both concur; you have inward and outward Signs of Grace: The inward Signs are a pure Conſcience, a ſincere Love for God and Religion, and whatever tends to the Glory and Honour of your Maker; The outward Signs are Acts

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of Obedience conformable to the inward Purity and Love of your Mind. Theſe are Fruits by which you may judge yourſelves. Our Saviour tells us, *that we may know Men by their Fruits*: Much rather may we know ourſelves by our own Fruits; eſpecially when we may know the Stock too from whence they grow, the Motions and Workings of our own Heart.

Hence it appears, that the Evidence of the Spirit is not any ſecret Inſpiration, or any Aſſurance conveyed to the Mind of the Faithful; but 'tis the Evidence of Works, ſuch as by the Spirit we perform: And therefore the only Sign of Sanctification is Holineſs; and the only Mark of Grace is to obey from the Heart the Word of God; And therefore they err, not knowing the Scriptures, who from this or the like Paſſages imagine, that the Spirit ever gives, or was ever deſigned to give, inward Aſſurance or Certainty to Men of their final State.

Hence likewiſe 'tis certain, that ſome go too far on the other Side, by denying that any Man may know himſelf to be in a State of Grace: For all the Children of God are in a State of Grace; and the Evidence of the Spirit of God and our own Spirit may make us certain, where they concur, as they

ought to do, that we are the Children of God. *If our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God:* Which is St. *John*'s Rule, and comprehends both the Evidences in the Text; for our Heart judges both of our inward and outward Obedience: And therefore, where our Hearts condemn us not, we have the Evidence of both Spirits, the End of which is Confidence.

But, laſtly, this Certainty does not extend to our future and final Salvation: For to be in a State of Grace is to be Heir of Salvation: But an Heir may be defeated, if by any After-act he incapacitates himſelf to inherit. In a Word, a State of Grace may be loſt; he that is the Child of God may ceaſe to be the Child of God: And therefore being certain and confident that you are now in a State of Grace cannot make you certain of your Salvation; but you muſt ſtill *work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling.* This we may learn from our Apoſtle's own Arguing here: *The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* The Conſequence of this is, *if Children, then Heirs,* Ver. 17. *But now are we Heirs through Hope,* he tells us in another Place; and at the twenty-fourth Verſe of this Chapter, *We are ſaved by Hope: But Hope that is ſeen*

ſeen is not Hope. Certainty ſhuts out Hope: And, ſince being Children makes us only Heirs through Hope, 'tis plain, being certain that we are now the Children of God can give us no abſolute Certainty of our Salvation: And therefore 'tis great Preſumption to talk of Security. Our Certainty reaches to our preſent Condition, which is enough to keep our Minds eaſy and contented. Other Certainty than this might make us remiſs: This may encourage us *to run with Patience the Race that is before us, and to labour in the Lord, knowing that our Labour ſhall not be in vain.*

DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN XX. 30, 31.

And many other Signs truly did Jeſus in the Preſence of his Diſciples, which are not written in this Book. But theſe are written, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God, and that believing ye might have Life through his Name.

THESE Words ſtand towards the Cloſe of St. *John*'s Goſpel, and are by ſome thought to be the laſt of his own Writing. They give us an Account of the Nature of his Goſpel, and of his End and Deſign in publiſhing it to the World. The Apoſtle does not pretend his Goſpel to be a perfect and complete Narrative of all that our Lord did whilſt he converſed among

Men, not even of all the Miracles and Wonders which he wrought in Confirmation of his Doctrine: *Many other Signs truly did Jeſus,— which are not written in this Book:* He adds farther, that the Signs omitted in his Account were done *in the Preſence of his Diſciples*, and were, conſequently, of as good Authority as thoſe related by himſelf. This was but a neceſſary Piece of Caution; for St. *John* wrote his Goſpel late, towards the End of his Life, after the Apoſtles and Diſciples of Chriſt had ſpread the Goſpel far and near, and had both by Preaching and Writing publiſhed the great Works and Signs done by their Maſter. To prevent therefore, the Suſpicions which ſome might be apt to entertain of their Teachers, when they found the great Evidences inſiſted on by them not mentioned by St. *John*, who, being the laſt Writer of the Apoſtles, would naturally, for that Reaſon, be ſuppoſed to be the moſt accurate; he declares that he had not recounted all the Signs done by Jeſus, but that there were many others, which, having been wrought in the Preſence of the Diſciples, might very well be taught and publiſhed by them, though omitted by himſelf.

But why does St. *John*, ſpeaking of the Miracles of Jeſus, take notice only that *they*

were

were done in the Preſence of the Diſciples? whereas in truth they were done in the Face of the Sun, in the moſt open and publick Manner, in the Sight of Friends and Foes; which is ſo advantageous a Circumſtance, and which adds ſo much to the Credibility of the Signs, that it ought ever to be remembered. St. *John* knew this very well, having in the courſe of his Goſpel often taken notice of this very Thing: Particularly in the Story of *Lazarus* he tells us, *that many Jews were with Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their Brother*, who followed Jeſus to the Grave, and ſaw *Lazarus* come forth to Life upon his Call: *Many of which*, ſays St. *John*, Chap. xi. 45, 46, *having ſeen the Things which Jeſus did, believed on him: But ſome of them went their ways to the Phariſees, and told them what Things Jeſus had done.* But the Reaſon why this is not inſiſted on in the Text is, that it was not to St. *John*'s Purpoſe: He is there ſpeaking of the authoritative Promulgation of the Goſpel, as is evident from the laſt Verſe, *Theſe Things are written that ye might believe:* And this led him no farther than to obſerve that the Preachers and Publiſhers of the Goſpel were Eye-witneſſes of the Things they atteſted, and therefore unexceptionable Witneſſes.

This is the true Foundation of the Apoſtles' Authority conſidered as Promulgers of Chriſtianity; which depended upon what they themſelves had ſeen or heard, and not upon what others had ſeen or heard, whether Friends or Foes. Other Circumſtances may be good collateral Evidence; but the Teſtimony of the Apoſtles reſts upon this, That they themſelves ſaw and heard what they have reported. And therefore the ſame Apoſtle in his firſt Epiſtle ſets forth this Evidence in the very ſame Manner: *That which was from the Beginning, which we have heard, which we have ſeen with our Eyes, which we have looked upon, and our Hands have handled, of the Word of Life—That which we have ſeen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye alſo may have Fellowſhip with us.*

You have alſo the Reaſon aſſigned which moved St. *John* to publiſh his Goſpel, which extends likewiſe to all the other Writings of the New Teſtament: *But theſe are written, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God; and that believing ye might have Life through his Name.* This Reaſon is not ſo ſtrictly to be urged, as if Writing were the only Way of publiſhing the Goſpel, which we know was effectually publiſhed to great Multitudes, before any Book of the New

New Teſtament was written, by the Preaching and Working of the Apoſtles. But thus far perhaps we may juſtly argue, That Writing is the beſt, if not the only Method of perpetuating the Teſtimony, and delivering down the Doctrines of Chriſt uncorrupted to diſtant Ages: And this Way has had the Conſent and Approbation of all civilized Nations; from whence it is that *ſcripta Lex* is uſed in the beſt Writers to ſignify an inſtituted Law, as diſtinguiſhed from the Law of Nature ariſing either from Inſtinct or Reaſon.

The Goſpels then were publiſhed that they might be a ſtanding Evidence to all Ages of God's Purpoſe to redeem the World by ſending his Son to take our Nature on him, *that he might die for our Sins, and riſe again for our Juſtification:* And it was abſolutely neceſſary to convey this Knowledge to the World by a proper Authority; for Revelation cannot obtain the Force and Authority of Law, or any way oblige the Conſciences of Men, till it be ſufficiently publiſhed and declared. This is univerſally true of all Laws whatever, both human and divine: And the Reaſon of it is plain; becauſe otherwiſe Men would be bound to an Impoſſibility, to obey a Law before they

knew what the Law was. For the ſame Reaſon alſo it muſt be allowed, that the Promulgation of the Law is the proper Care and Concern of the Lawgiver: For the Law muſt come from the Governor to the Governed; and the Subject, till he knows the Law, that is, till it is promulged and ſufficiently declared to him, can have no Concern in it. Apply this to Revelation, and you will perceive, that it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that God has given any Law to the World which he has not ſufficiently promulged and declared; for that would be to ſuppoſe that God intended to give, and not to give, a Law to Mankind at the ſame time. An inſufficient Promulgation is no Promulgation; and therefore all Powers and Qualities neceſſary to give Credit and Authority to the Publiſhers of a Revelation are always ſuppoſed, when we ſpeak of the Truth and Authority of Revelation. God may reveal what he ſees fit to one or two or more Men; but, unleſs ſuch Men are commiſſioned and duly qualified to ſatisfy others that ſuch Things have been made known to them, others are no more concerned in the Revelation, than if it had never been made. It would take up too much of your Time to inquire particularly what are the neceſſary Qualifications to conſtitute

ſtitute a proper Witneſs to Revelation. It may ſuffice to obſerve, that no Man is naturally qualified for it, for this plain Reaſon, becauſe all natural Qualifications are eaſily counterfeited to ſerve a Purpoſe. Honeſty, Sincerity, and Religion may be put on in Appearance; and a Man may bear himſelf ſo well in the Diſguiſe, as not to be diſcovered. Things in common Life are eaſily believed upon the Report of honeſt Men: But then it muſt be conſidered, that the moral Probability of ſuch Things goes a great way in rendering them credible. 'Tis no Shock to our Minds to believe that ſuch a Thing happened at ſuch a Time, which we know often does happen in the Courſe of Things, and probably might happen then. In ſuch Caſes a ſmall Weight inclines the Mind to aſſent: But it requires other kind of Evidence to make the Mind ſubmit to the Belief of Things which are ſupported by no moral Probability, but are quite out of the ordinary Courſe and Nature of Things. This ſhews that no Revelation can be ſufficiently promulged and declared to the World by Men, unleſs they are extraordinarily qualified and commiſſioned to that Purpoſe. We do not therefore rely merely upon the Honeſty or moral

moral Character of the firſt Preachers of the Goſpel, but on their Authority proved and ſupported by many wonderful Works which God enabled them to do, and on their Integrity ſufficiently eſtabliſhed by what they did and ſuffered for the ſake of the Goſpel.

But here the Queſtion is aſked, How ſhall we diſtinguiſh between the Pretences to Revelation, which are ſo many and various, all of which have an equal Right to be heard, that 'tis endleſs to look for Religion in ſuch a Croud of Pretenders to it, and difficult to determine the Merit of the ſeveral Claims? So that the only ſure Way is to take up with Natural Religion, which is every-where uniformly the ſame, and in which there is no Danger of being deluded and miſled by Impoſture; for Natural Religion admits of no Counterfeit: And, ſince every Man's Reaſon is Judge in this Caſe, no Man can be cheated but by himſelf: And all Men are ſo much their own Friends, that in a Matter of ſo great Moment, which ſo nearly concerns their preſent and their future Happineſs, they may ſecurely truſt themſelves.

Now, to form a true Judgment upon this Caſe, it will be neceſſary firſt to ſtate the Queſtion right upon the Foot of this Objection,

jection, and then to examine what Weight of Reaſon there is in it.

Firſt then, The Queſtion muſt relate to Revelation conſidered only as the Rule and Meaſure of Religion: For the Diſpute between Nature and Revelation is confined to this one Point, Which is the beſt and ſafeſt Guide in Religion? 'Tis abſurd therefore to bring Inſtances of any Revelations in this Caſe, which do not pretend to this Property, that were never given, or pretended to be given, as a Rule of Religion: For, when Men talk of the various Revelations that have been in the World, and the Difficulty of determining which they ought to obey, they cannot take into their Conſideration the Anſwer of the Oracle to *Cræſus*, or the ſeveral other Anſwers on particular Occaſions recorded in the *Greek* and *Roman* Hiſtories, nor yet the particular Meſſages which God ſent by the Hands of different Prophets to the People of *Iſrael*; for theſe Revelations, whether true or falſe, being confined to particular Occaſions, are out of the preſent Queſtion, and have no Relation to the Inquiry concerning a Rule or Meaſure of Religion. This Obſervation will in a great meaſure overthrow the Truth of the Fact upon which

the Objection is built; for upon this View there are not many Revelations that can come into Competition: In the Heathen World I know of none; for, though there were ſundry Pretences to Revelation, yet none was ſet up as a common Standard for the Religion of Mankind. The Religion of *Rome* was chiefly introduced by *Numa*, who pretended a Revelation for the Foundation of his Authority: But 'tis plain he aimed at nothing farther than modelling the Religion of his City, and had no Thought of the reſt of the World in what he did. Nor had the *Romans* any Senſe that their Religion concerned any but themſelves: And therefore, when they extended their Conqueſts, Religion was their leaſt Concern; they left the World in that Reſpect as they found it, and Men were not ſo much as invited to take their Religion. Now 'tis evident, that no Law, either human or divine, extends farther than the Lawgiver intends. Suppoſe then, if you pleaſe, *Numa*'s Religion to be a Revelation; yet, ſince it was given and declared only to the People of *Rome*, the reſt of the World can have no Concern in it. That no Syſtem of Religion in the Heathen World claimed as a general Law, is evident from the Anſwer returned by the Oracle, when

when the Inquiry was, Which Religion was beſt? The Anſwer was, That every Man ſhould worſhip according to the Cuſtom of the Country where he was. So that all Religions were eſteemed equally good, and the moſt any Religion pretended to was, a local Authority, which reached no farther than the Laws of the Country did: And, unleſs Men are for giving more to the pretended Heathen Revelations, than ever they claimed for themſelves, or was claimed for them by thoſe who introduced them and lived under them, they cannot be brought into this Queſtion, ſince they have no Relation to us, any more than the many civil Laws and Conſtitutions of the ſame Countries had: And Men may as reaſonably complain of the great Variety of civil and municipal Laws that diſtract their Obedience, and then inſtance in the Laws of the *Medes* and *Perſians*, as they now complain of the Variety of Revelations, inſtancing in ſuch as, if they were true, concern them as little as the Laws of *Perſia* do.

But perhaps it will be ſaid, That, though theſe Religions do not oblige us, yet nevertheleſs, if any of them were true, they effectually overthrow all others; for God

cannot contradict himſelf, whether he ſpeaks to one Nation, or to all the World: And upon this Foot theſe ſeveral Pretences come within our Inquiry. This Reaſoning may be good; but then it does moſt effectually exclude all theſe Pretences: For the Voice of Nature is the Voice of God, and therefore cannot be contradicted by God. No Revelation therefore can intitle itſelf to be conſidered, if it contradicts any one plain Principle of Natural Religion: And there is not any one Form of Religion within the Period mentioned that does not ſplit upon this Rock; and therefore there is no Danger of your being oppreſſed with Labour and Study in examining their ſeveral Claims.

But farther; Which of them all ſo much as pretends to the Eſſentials neceſſary to conſtitute a Law, either human or divine? Where was it publiſhed and declared? by whom, and how qualified? Can you name the Perſons, or produce the Goſpel of ſuch Religion? Take the Inſtance of *Rome*: What was *Numa*? a King, and therefore ſubmitted to in the Innovations of Religion: But what one Mark of a divine Commiſſion can you produce? and yet without ſuch Marks even a true Revelation could be of

no Authority. Try all other Inſtances, and you will ſtill ſee how weakly the Objection againſt Revelation is ſupported by any Pretences of the Heathen World.

But ſtill it will be urged, That the many Pretences to Inſpiration, which have been received and admitted, are ſo many Inſtances of the Weakneſs of Men, and their Inability to diſtinguiſh between true and falſe in the preſent Caſe. And how can we ever truſt ourſelves in examining Revelation, and be ſecure in our Judgment, when we ſee all the World has erred before us, and Men wiſe as ourſelves, who thought too, it may be, that they acted as rationally as we do, miſtaken in every Inſtance of this kind? Is it not eaſily ſuppoſed, that the World is miſled now, as formerly it has been? Why then ſhould we expoſe ourſelves to almoſt certain Error by following the ſame Steps, and purſue thoſe Principles which have never yet produced ought but Deceit and Falſhood? Whatever Force there is in this Argument, it muſt recoil upon the Cauſe of Natural Religion; for certain it is from the Hiſtory of all Ages, both paſt and preſent, that Men have erred groſly and univerſally in many principal Points of Natural Religion. How

then ſhall we ever truſt ourſelves in examining the Dictates of Nature, ſince the Attempt has in all Ages produced Folly, Ignorance, and Superſtition? What Security have we that we ſhall not follow our Forefathers in all their Errors and Miſtakes, if we guide ourſelves by the ſame Clue of Thread which directed them? Nay, in truth, the Errors and Superſtitions of the Heathen World, even thoſe which pretended to derive themſelves from Oracles and Revelations of the Gods, are chargeable upon this Blindneſs and Ignorance of Nature. Had Nature but done her Part, Men could not have been impoſed on by ſuch groſs and palpable Superſtition: Had the natural Notion of the Deity been preſerved entire and uncorrupted, no one Form of the Heathen Worſhip could have ſtood before it; but they muſt have all diſperſed, as the Clouds fleet away before the Sun.

What is it now that diſcovers to you theſe Impoſtures, which were not ſeen by thoſe before you? Is it not manifeſtly that true Senſe of Reaſon and Nature which hath been new kindled and lighted up in the Mind of Man by the Goſpel of Chriſt? Was it not then the Want of this Senſe that darkened

darkened the Old World? But, be the Cauſe what it will, if you judge rightly in ſuppoſing yourſelf able now to diſcern the Dictates of Reaſon and Nature, without which you ought not to pretend even to Natural Religion, 'tis abſurd to pretend that you are in the ſame Danger of being deceived by pretended Revelations as the Old World was, ſince you have, and claim to have, that Light, the Want of which was the very Thing that expoſed them to all their Errors and Superſtitions. And, to ſhew that this Objection is a mere Feint, aſk any one who makes it, whether he thinks any Man could impoſe one of the Heathen Forms of Worſhip, or any thing like it, on him? No Man, I believe, but would be angry to be ſuſpected of ſo much Weakneſs. Yet theſe very Forms were impoſed on your Forefathers; and you are confident, and with good Reaſon, that they cannot be impoſed on you. 'Tis evident then, that you are not in the ſame Caſe with them, that their Danger is not your Danger; and, conſequently, their Errors about Revelation are no Objections againſt hearkening to Revelation now, when we know ourſelves effectually ſecured againſt their Errors.

From theſe Pretences let us turn to view the true Revelations belonging to the ſame Period,

Period, and ſee how far they relate to the preſent Caſe. Thoſe given to particular Men upon particular Occaſions are out of the Queſtion, for Reaſons already mentioned.

The Law of *Moſes* was publiſhed and declared with great Solemnity, and by Perſons every way qualified: It contains a Rule or Syſtem of Religion, and is ſtill maintained by its Diſciples in oppoſition to the Goſpel. Here then perhaps may ſeem to be ſome Difficulty, when two Revelations, that have equal Pleas to Truth, are ſet in competition one againſt the other. This Queſtion muſt be argued upon different Principles with *Jews*, and with other Men: For the Law was given and declared to the *Jews*, and they were under the Obligations of it: They therefore are concerned to inquire, not only of the Truth of a ſubſequent Revelation, but alſo whether it does ſufficiently abrogate their Law, or whether it is to ſubſiſt with it; as likewiſe whether their Law has any-where precluded them from admitting any farther Revelations. But to us the Queſtion is, how we are concerned with the Law, and whether there can be any Competition with reſpect to us between the Law and the Goſpel. From the Principles already mentioned we may ſoon determine this Queſtion: For 'tis plain, that

no

no Revelation can oblige thoſe to whom it is not given; that Promulgation is ſo far of the Eſſence of the Law, that no Man in Reaſon or Equity owes any Obligation to a Law till 'tis made known to him; that the Obligations therefore of a Law are limited by the Terms of the Promulgation. Apply this to the Law of *Moſes*; you will find that Law in the very Promulgation of it confined to the People of *Iſrael*: *Hear, O Iſrael!* is the Introduction to the Promulgation; which it could not have been, had the Law been deſigned for the whole World. And this was known to be the Caſe under the Law. *Moſes*, who beſt underſtood the Extent of his own Commiſſion, ſays thus to the People of *Iſrael*: *What Nation is there ſo great, that hath Statutes and Judgments ſo righteous, as all this Law which I ſet before you this Day?* Deut. iv. 8. The holy Pſalmiſt expreſſes the ſame Senſe in theſe Words: *He ſheweth his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and his Judgments unto Iſrael. He hath not dealt ſo with any Nation; And, as for his Judgments, they have not known them.* Pſal. cxlvii. 19, 20. From all which 'tis evident, that the Law of *Moſes* has no Claim to our Obedience. The moral Part of the Law, when underſtood, will

will oblige every rational Creature; but this is not the Obligation we are now ſpeaking of. The Law of *Moſes* then cannot add to the Number of Revelations which create us any Difficulty in determining ourſelves: For, let the Caſe happen as it will, we are free from the Law. But the Law affords even to us abundant Evidence for the Truth of the Goſpel. The Proofs from Prophecy are, as convincing to us as to the *Jews*: For it matters not whether we are under the Law, or not under the Law, ſince Conviction in this Caſe ariſes from another and different Principle. But I haſten to a Concluſion.

Let us then conſider briefly, what Alteration has happened ſince the Coming of Chriſt to diſturb and unſettle our Judgments in this great Affair. A Man perhaps, who is a great Reader, may be able to produce many Inſtances of Impoſtors ſince that Time, and imagine that they are all ſo many dead Weights upon the Cauſe of Revelation: But what is become of them, and their Doctrine? they are vaniſhed, and their Place is not to be found. What Pretence is there then to ſet up theſe Revelations? Is God grown ſo weak and impotent, that we may ſuppoſe theſe to be his Revelations, and intended for

the

the Uſe of the World, had he not been baffled at firſt ſetting out? If God intends a Law for the Uſe of the World, he is obliged, if I may uſe the Expreſſion, to publiſh the Law to the World: And therefore Want of ſuch Publication evidently ſhews that God was not concerned in them, or at leaſt did not intend that we ſhould be concerned in them: And therefore 'tis abſurd to inſtance in ſuch Pretences as Difficulties in our Way, which in truth are not in our Way at all.

And thus the Caſe of Revelation ſtood, and the Goſpel had no Competitor, till the great and ſucceſsful Impoſtor *Mahomet* aroſe: He indeed pretends a Commiſſion to all the World, and found Means ſufficiently to publiſh his Pretences: He aſſerts his Authority upon the Strength of Revelation, and endeavours to transfer the Advantages of the Goſpel Evidence to himſelf, having that Pattern before him to copy after: And, ſhould we ſay that the Alcoran was never promulged to us by Perſons duly commiſſioned, it may be anſwered perhaps, that the Alcoran is as well publiſhed to us as the Goſpel is to them; which has ſome Appearance of an Anſwer, though the Fact is indeed otherwiſe;

for even the Alcoran owns Jeſus for a true Prophet.

But with reſpect to this Inſtance I perſuade myſelf it can be no very diſtracting Study to find Reaſons to determine our Choice. Go to your Natural Religion: Lay before her *Mahomet* and his Diſciples arrayed in Armour and in Blood, riding in Triumph over the Spoils of thouſands and tens of thouſands, who fell by his victorious Sword: Shew her the Cities which he ſet in Flames, the Countries which he ravaged and deſtroyed, and the miſerable Diſtreſs of all the Inhabitants of the Earth. When ſhe has viewed him in this Scene, carry her into his Retirements! Shew her the Prophet's Chamber, his Concubines and Wives; let her ſee his Adultery, and hear him alledge Revelation and his divine Commiſſion to juſtify his Luſt and his Oppreſſion. When ſhe is tired with this Proſpect, then ſhew her the bleſſed Jeſus, humble and meek, doing Good to all the Sons of Men, patiently inſtructing both the Ignorant and the Perverſe. Let her ſee him in his moſt retired Privacies: Let her follow him to the Mount, and hear his Devotions and Supplications to God. Carry her to his Table to view his poor Fare, and hear his heavenly

heavenly Diſcourſe. Let her ſee him injured, but not provoked: Let her attend him to the Tribunal, and conſider the Patience with which he endured the Scoffs and Reproaches of his Enemies. Lead her to his Croſs; and let her view him in the Agony of Death, and hear his laſt Prayer for his Perſecutors: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

When Natural Religion has viewed both, aſk, Which is the Prophet of God? But her Anſwer we have already had; when ſhe ſaw Part of this Scene through the Eyes of the Centurion who attended at the Croſs; by him ſhe ſpoke and ſaid, *Truly this Man was the Son of God.*

DISCOURSE X.

Acts ii. 22.

Jeſus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by Miracles and Wonders and Signs, which God did by him in the midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know.

THE great Evidence of Chriſtianity, to which our Saviour and his Apoſtles conſtantly appeal, are the Miracles, Wonders, and Signs, which God did by the Hand of Jeſus to confirm the Authority and Commiſſion he gave him to publiſh and declare his Will to the World. This being the only reaſonable Evidence that he could give of his coming from God, our Saviour ſays expreſly, *If I had not done among them*

the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin, John xv. 24. If he had not given theſe undeniable Proofs of his being a Teacher ſent from God, they would have been acquitted, not only in Reaſon, but even out of his own Mouth. *If I do not the Works of my Father*, ſays he, *believe me not*, John x. 37: *If I bear witneſs of myſelf, my Witneſs is not true*, John v. 31: And he adds, Verſe 36, *The Works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame Works that I do, bear witneſs of me that the Father ſent me.* Thus, when St. *John* ſent to him to inquire expreſly whether he were the Chriſt, or no, he ſhewed the Meſſengers his Works, and bade them relate to *John* what they had ſeen; refering it to him to judge by his Works, which were the only proper Evidence, whether he were the Chriſt, or no.

The Truth then of Chriſtianity reſting upon the Authority of Miracles, I ſhall endeavour in the following Diſcourſe to ſhew,

Firſt, Wherein the true Force of this Argument from Miracles conſiſts, and what it is that they prove.

Secondly, What ſort of Works are to be admitted for Miracles in proving the Truth of any Religion.

Firſt,

First, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew wherein the true Force of this Argument from Miracles conſiſts, or what it is that they prove.

Miracles are not intended to prove the Being of God, nor the Doctrines of Morality: For Natural Religion is ſupported by Natural Reaſon, and has for its Evidence the Works of Nature. Thus St. *Paul* argues in his firſt Chapter to the *Romans*, declaring that what was to be known of God was manifeſt to Men, God having ſhewed it unto them: *For the inviſible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* And in the moſt corrupt and degenerate Times God did not leave himſelf without Witneſs, continuing to do Good, to give Rain from Heaven and fruitful Seaſons, filling the Hearts of Men with Joy and Gladneſs. Theſe are the ſtanding Proofs of the Being and Goodneſs of God: And Men need but open their Eyes, and look round them, to ſee the wonderful and ſtupendous Works of Nature, which lead directly to the Knowledge of God. And what greater Evidence can Man have than this? For, if the making one World will not prove the Being of a God, the making of ten thouſand will not. And

therefore this is a Principle of Religion not learnt from Revelation, but which is always ſuppoſed as the Foundation of Revelation: For no Revelation can bring greater Works to prove its Authority, than the Works by which the clear and unexceptionable Dictates of Natural Religion are proved: For the Diſtinction between Miracles and Works of Nature is no more than this, That Works of Nature are Works of great Power produced conſtantly and in a regular Courſe, which Courſe we call Nature; That Miracles are Works of great Power alſo, wrought in an unuſual Way: But they are both conſidered in the ſame Light, and with equal Advantage, as Effects leading to the Knowledge of a great, though inviſible, Power. Thus we muſt acknowledge great Power to be ſhewn in the Sun's conſtant Riſing and Setting; and as great in his Standing ſtill, ſhould we ſee him ſtopped in his Courſe for the Space of a whole Day. That we have all Eyes to ſee, and Ears to hear, is an Effect of as great Power, as giving Sight to one born blind, or Hearing to one born deaf. Upon this Account 'tis impoſſible that any true Revelation ſhould contradict or evacuate any clear Dictate of Natural Religion, which ſtands at leaſt upon as good a Bottom as any

Revelation

Revelation can do. And therefore the Principles of Natural Religion muſt be ſuppoſed for the Foundation of Revealed: Which is intimated by the Writer to the *Hebrews*: *He that comes to God, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him*; that is, he muſt bring this Belief with him: For a Revelation is not to prove the Being of a God, or that he loves Virtue, and hates Vice. God never wrought Miracles for this Purpoſe, having ſufficiently evidenced himſelf from the Beginning of the World by the viſible Things of the Creation: And had any one aſked our Saviour to ſhew a Proof that there was a God, I am apt to imagine he would have turned him over to the Works of Nature, as he did the rich Man's Brethren to *Moſes* and the Prophets for a Proof of a future State.

But, to aſcertain the Uſe of Miracles, it will be proper to conſider when and for what Purpoſe they were introduced. In early Times we meet with none: Nor was there any Occaſion for them ſo long as Men preſerved a right Notion of God as Maker and abſolute Lord of the Univerſe, and were acquainted with him, (I had almoſt ſaid, perſonally acquainted with him) and knew his Voice when he ſpoke to them; for ſo

long they received his Commands without Doubt or Heſitation: And, being perfectly ſatisfied that the Command came from God, what Weight or Authority could the multiplying Signs and Wonders add to their Perſuaſion? for Signs and Wonders could only ſhew that the Command came from God, to whom all Nature obeyed and was ſubject: And, as they wanted no ſuch Proof, there was no Room or Occaſion for the introducing of Miracles.

But, when Idolatry prevailed in the World, and every Nation had its peculiar Deity, to whom they gave the Name of God, it became neceſſary, in order to preſerve true Religion in the World, to diſtinguiſh between the true God, and the pretended Deities adored by the Heathen. The great Works of the Creation were ſtanding Proofs of the Being of a God, and common to all Nations; and therefore the Belief of a Deity was the common Perſuaſion of the World: For, though Men in general were become Idolaters, yet they were not Atheiſts: But then the true God was forgotten or almoſt loſt in the Multiplicity of falſe Gods, to whom the Blindneſs of the World aſcribed the Honour and Power due to the One Supreme only.

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In this State of Things God thought proper to exert himſelf in ſuch Acts of Power as ſhould demonſtrate his Superiority above all Gods of the Heathen, and to aſſume a Character of Diſtinction, that the Hand might be certainly known from which the mighty Works proceeded: And it is very obſervable, that God did publickly aſſume ſuch a Character, and work Miracles, at one and the ſame Time. The firſt Miracles, of which we have any Account, were thoſe wrought by *Moſes* in *Egypt*; and at the ſame Time God declared himſelf to be the God of the *Hebrews*. And this was the firſt Declaration of himſelf to the World under ſuch a Character: For we do not read he ever ſtyled himſelf the God of *Noah*, or the God of *Shem*, or of any other Perſon, till after the Call of *Abraham*; for to him he appeared at firſt, and ſaid, *I am the Almighty God*, Gen. xvii. 1. And, though in the Family of *Abraham* he was known by the Name of the God of *Abraham*, yet was not that Relation underſtood in the World, till *Moſes* had expreſs Command to make it known to *Pharaoh* and his People. And the Accuracy with which the Meſſage was delivered, is obſervable: For, though God commanded *Moſes* in ſpeaking to the Children

of *Iſrael* to ſay, *The Lord God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob, hath ſent me*; yet in ſpeaking to the King of *Egypt*, who probably might know little of *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*, his Orders are to ſay, *The God of the Hebrews hath met us*, &c. Exod. iii. 15, 18. and v. 3.

It may appear ſtrange to us to hear the great God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, aſſuming to himſelf a Character that ſeems to limit the Right of his Dominion: For why does He, who is God of all the World, ſtyle himſelf *the God of the Hebrews?* Is he not the God of all Nations? Or, why does he appeal to Miracles wrought under the Character of God of the *Hebrews*, when the great Works of the Creation (of all Miracles the greateſt) are a conſtant and perpetual Evidence of his almighty Power and univerſal Dominion?

To account for this, you muſt conſider the State of Religion in the World at the Time when God aſſumed this Character, and ſent *Moſes* to ſhew Signs and Wonders in the Land of *Egypt*. All the Nations of the Earth had at that Time their ſeveral local Deities; and, as every Nation is naturally inclined to think their own the beſt, a

Meſſage delivered in the Name of the Deity of any one People could have no Effect upon another. And therefore, when *Moſes* delivered a Meſſage to *Pharaoh* in the Name of the God of *Iſrael*, *Pharaoh*'s Anſwer was, *Who is the Lord, that I ſhould obey his Voice to let Iſrael go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Iſrael go.* Exod. v. 2. Now the Way which God made choice of to convince *Pharaoh* was *by multiplying Signs and Wonders in the Land of Egypt, that the Egyptians might know that he was the Lord, when he ſtretched forth his Hand upon Egypt.* Exod. vii. 3, 5.

Here the Queſtion plainly was between God under the Character of the God of the *Hebrews*, and the God of the *Egyptians*, which of them was Supreme: And this Point could only be determined by a Superiority of Power ſhewn in Miracles. And, if we attend to the Nature of the Miracles wrought by *Moſes*, they will appear to be ſuch as plainly pointed out the Hand of the Almighty Creator. The Author of the Book of *Wiſdom* tells us, *That the Egyptians, being deceived by the fooliſh Devices of their Wickedneſs, worſhiped Serpents void of Reaſon,* Wiſd. xi. 15: And the moſt antient Account we have of that People from profane Hiſtory confirms the Obſervation. And therefore the firſt Miracle performed

performed by *Moſes* was a direct Conqueſt over the Deities of *Pharaoh*: For, when his Rod was changed into a Serpent, and devoured all the Serpents produced by the Magicians, what could *Pharaoh* reaſonably conclude, but that the God, in whoſe Name *Moſes* ſpoke, was *God of Gods, and Lord of Lords?* And, when the Magicians were compelled to acknowledge the divine Power of *Moſes*, and openly to declare to *Pharaoh* that the Finger of God was in it, one would imagine that this Triumph over the Deities and Magicians of *Egypt* ſhould have furniſhed a complete Anſwer to that Demand of *Pharaoh*, *Who is the Lord, that I ſhould obey his Voice?* But he continued obſtinate.

But the Purpoſe of God in ſending *Moſes* to ſhew his Wonders in the Land of *Egypt* was intended not only for the Deliverance of the *Hebrews*, but to make his Name known over all the Nations of the Earth: For, as *Egypt* was at that Time a great and flouriſhing Kingdom, and was notoriouſly the Seat of Superſtition and Idolatry, from whence the Infection ſpread to all the Nations round about, it was of all others the propereſt Scene for God to exert his Power and Authority for the Conviction of all People. And for this Reaſon God had connived

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at the Wickedneſs and Idolatry of *Egypt*, and ſuffered the Kingdom to grow very great, that their Puniſhment might be the more exemplary: *In very deed for this Cauſe have I raiſed thee up, for to ſhew in thee my Power, and that my Name may be declared throughout all the Earth*, Exod. ix. 16.

The Miracles wrought in *Egypt* were ſuch as all the World had a Concern in: For they were ſo near akin to the Works of the Creation, that by a juſt Compariſon they might be known to come from the ſame Hand: For who but the Author of Nature could ſtir up Things animate and inanimate to puniſh Offenders? When God ſlew all the Firſtborn in *Egypt* in one Night, and preſerved the People of *Iſrael* in Safety; when he led the People of *Iſrael* through the Red Sea by commanding the Waters to open them a Paſſage, and drowned *Pharaoh* and all his Hoſt by bringing the Waters back upon them; did not God by theſe Signs plainly ſpeak to them, and ſay, *See now that I, even I am He, and there is no God with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: Neither is there any that can deliver out of my Hand?* Deut. xxxii. 39.

This Uſe of Miracles appears throughout the Hiſtory of the *Jews*. Thus, in the Conteſt

Conteſt between *Elijah* and the Prieſts of *Baal*, the Prophet laid before the People this Choice: *If the Lord be God, follow him; but, if Baal, then follow him*, 1 Kings xviii. 21. The People were ſilent: The Diſpute was refered to be determined by Signs and Wonders: And, when the People ſaw the Hand of God made manifeſt, they fell on their Faces, and ſaid, *The Lord he is the God! the Lord he is the God!* Ver. 39.

The Caſe of the Deſtruction of the Army of the *Aſſyrians* in the Reign of *Hezekiah*, when an hundred and fourſcore and five thouſand Men were deſtroyed in one Night by the Angel of God, ſeems to carry with it a Severity hard to be accounted for. The King of *Aſſyria* with his great Hoſt laid Siege to *Jeruſalem*; and ſo had other Princes done without falling under ſo great Calamity: But the Caſe of *Sennacherib* had this peculiar in it, That he ſent a Defiance to God, and boaſted himſelf of many Victories obtained againſt him. Hear the Meſſage he ſent to *Hezekiah*: *Thus ſaith the great King, the King of Aſſyria, What Confidence is this wherein thou truſteſt? Hearken not unto Hezekiah: For thus ſaith the King of Aſſyria, Hath any of the Gods of the Nations delivered at all his Land out of the Hand of the King of Aſſyria?*

Who

Who are they among all the Gods of the Countries that have delivered their Country out of my Hand, that the Lord ſhould deliver Jeruſalem out of my Hand? 2 Kings xviii. You ſee here the King of *Aſſyria* acting the ſame Part with the King of *Egypt*; and, if his Power was broken all at once, he ſuffered but in the ſame Way that the King of *Egypt* did; and this Judgment was brought upon him with the ſame View, to make him an Example, and to vindicate and aſſert the Supremacy of God in the Eyes of all the Nations.

This appears to be the firſt and original Uſe of Miracles; and they are an immediate and direct Proof of what they are brought to aſſert, the Supremacy of God: For, when the ſingle Queſtion is, who is the Mightieſt, muſt it not be decided in his favour who viſibly exerts the greateſt Acts of Power? In this Caſe no Difficulty can ariſe from the Suppoſition that other Beings as well as God are able to work Miracles. The Miracles performed by the Magicians in *Egypt* were ſo far from leſſening the Authority of the Works done by *Moſes*, that they added to it: For, the greater the Powers were which God humbled and ſubdued, the greater Evidence did he give of his own Superiority. So that, whether

whether you ſuppoſe that Evil Spirits have natural Powers to do ſuch and the like Works, or are ſometimes employed and permitted by God, for the Puniſhment of Men, to deceive them by ſuch Appearances, in both Caſes they are equally ſubject to the Power of God.

With reſpect to the People of the *Jews* Miracles had a double Uſe: For by their long Continuance in *Egypt* they became infected with the Errors and Superſtitions of the Country, and ſerved their Idols. So that they wanted a Proof that the God of their Fathers was indeed the Supreme Being, as much as the *Egyptians* themſelves. Thus the Prophet *Ezekiel* ſays in the Name of God, *In the Day when I choſe Iſrael, and lifted up mine Hand unto the Seed of the Houſe of Jacob, and made myſelf known unto them in the Land of Egypt; when I lifted up mine Hand unto them, ſaying, I am the Lord your God; then ſaid I unto them, Caſt ye away every Man the Abominations of his Eyes, and defile not yourſelves with the Idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled againſt me; they did not caſt away the Abominations of their Eyes, neither did they forſake the Idols of Egypt.* Ezek. xx. 5, &c. Which Account given by the Prophet ſhews plainly their

their corrupt State in *Egypt*, which was not eaſily worn off, as appears from their frequent Acts of Diſobedience in their Paſſage through the Wilderneſs, and their great Propenſity to fall back into Idolatry: So that God was frequently provoked to deſtroy them; and, had they been choſen for their own ſake, they would have been deſtroyed: But, God having made choice of them to be his own peculiar People, and intending to manifeſt himſelf to the Heathen World by the Protection of that People, *he ſaved them for his own Name's ſake*: Which is the Account the Prophet *Ezekiel* gives, ſpeaking in the Name of God, *I ſaid, I will pour out my Fury upon them, to accompliſh my Anger againſt them in the midſt of the Land of Egypt. But I wrought for my Name's ſake, that it ſhould not be polluted before the Heathen, among whom they were, in whoſe Sight I made myſelf known unto them in bringing them forth out of the Land of Egypt.* Ver. 8, 9.

But there was another Uſe of Miracles peculiar to the *Jews*, in which the *Egyptians* had no Concern: For *Moſes* was ſent not only to be their Deliverer, but alſo to be their Lawgiver. With the *Egyptians* he had no Covenant to make, nor new Statutes to give: He required of *Pharaoh* to let the Children

Children of *Iſrael* go; which in Juſtice and Equity he ought to have done, conſidering how his Country had been ſaved by one of that Family, and how highly he offended againſt the Laws of Hoſpitality by detaining them as Slaves, who came into his Country upon the Hopes and Promiſe of Protection. But the *Jews* were called out of *Egypt* to be the peculiar People of God, and to be put under a new Covenant and new Laws, under the immediate Government of God; Bleſſings which they had no Right to expect, and for the Accompliſhment of which *Moſes* could give them no Aſſurance, but by the Evidence of ſuch Works as plainly proceeded from the Hand of God, and proved the Commiſſion which *Moſes* had to ſpeak in his Name.

The *Jewiſh* Government, being a Theocracy, leads us to expect a Series of Miracles in the Adminiſtration by the immediate Hand of Providence; and ſo indeed we find the Caſe to be: And the wonderful Preſervation of that People, when obedient, and the as wonderful Puniſhments, when they were diſobedient, were ſtanding Proofs to themſelves, and to all the Nations round about them, that their God was the only Lord and Governor of the World. But

Moſes

Moſes had no Succeſſor as a Lawgiver: Prophets and righteous Men were often ſent by God to reprove and admoniſh the People for their manifold Tranſgreſſions of the Law given by *Moſes*, but without any Authority to add to, or diminiſh from it. And ſo the Caſe ſtood, till the Great Prophet, like unto *Moſes*, came in the full Power and Authority of God to make a new Covenant, not with one People, but with all the Nations of the Earth, *Jeſus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God by Miracles and Wonders and Signs.*

It has been before obſerved, That the great Doctrines of Natural Religion have for their Evidence the Works of Nature, and want not the Support of Miracles. But, when any new Doctrine is publiſhed to the World, or any new Command, of which Nature has given no Notice, it is of neceſſity that ſuch new Doctrines ſhould be eſtabliſhed by new Proofs. One Thing indeed we learn from Natural Reaſon, That God is to be truſted and obeyed in whatever he promiſes or commands: But ſtill a Proof is required, that ſuch new Doctrine or Command does really proceed from God. And this ſhews how neceſſary Miracles are to the Introduction of a new Revelation: Not that Miracles can prove the Truth of any

Doctrine; but they directly prove the Commiſſion of the Perſon who does them to proceed from Him by whoſe Power alone they could be performed. This Diſtinction between Miracles conſidered as a Proof of the Doctrine, and as confirming the Authority and Commiſſion of the Perſon who reveals it, will plainly appear, upon conſidering what the Caſe would be, ſhould any Man openly perform unqueſtionable Miracles, and then retire in Silence, without declaring any Purpoſe he had: The great Works might aſtoniſh and confound us; but we could not poſſibly make any Uſe of them: We might indeed conclude, that ſome great and inviſible Power aſſiſted and enabled the Man to perform the Works; but what that inviſible Power had to do with us, or we with it, we could by no juſt Inference conclude. But, ſhould ſuch a Man declare himſelf to be a Meſſenger from God commiſſioned to publiſh his Will to the World, and appeal to the great Works which he did as a Proof of the Authority he had received; the Miracles, though, conſidered in themſelves, they do not directly prove his Doctrine, yet do they eſtabliſh his Authority, and give the Force of a divine Command to what he publiſhes in God's Name.

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The Law of *Moſes* then requiring Submiſſion and Obedience to Commands and Doctrines which have no Eſtabliſhment in the Light of Reaſon and Nature, it was neceſſary to found them upon the Authority of God, to which no Submiſſion could be due, till ſufficient Evidence was given of it, to guard Men againſt Impoſition and Deceit either from wicked Men or wicked Spirits: And this made Miracles to be a neceſſary Proof in the Eſtabliſhment of a new Revelation.

We ſee then to what Purpoſes Miracles were originally introduced, and in what Manner applied by *Moſes:* And, whoever conſiders of what Conſequence it was to the Happineſs of Mankind to have a ſtanding Evidence always before their Eyes of the Unity and Supremacy of God manifeſted in his Government of the *Jewiſh* Nation, and how far the *Moſaic* Diſpenſation prepared the Way, and laid the Foundation, for the Accompliſhment of his great Work in the Salvation of the World by Chriſt Jeſus, will ſee Reaſon to think that the End propoſed was worthy of God, and fully accounts for his Interpoſition by Signs and Wonders, which were Acts not only of great Power, but

of great Goodneſs and Benevolence towards Mankind.

If we conſider the Miracles of the Goſpel, we ſhall find that they had the ſame Ends in View. If *Moſes* withſtood the Magicians of *Egypt*, and manifeſted a Superiority of Power over them, and the falſe Gods whom they ſerved, our Saviour did much more in oppoſition to the Power of Satan, and the wicked Spirits who had taken poſſeſſion of Men, and tormented them in divers Manners: In ſubduing them he ſhewed ſuch an uncontroulable Power, that they were obedient to his Command; and, when he ſaid Go, they were forced to go, yielding a ready, though unwilling, Obedience. And, as the Goſpel ſpread, Idolatry fled before it, the Heathen Deities became dumb, and their Oracles were ſilenced. And, if we look abroad into the World, and take a View of the Nations where Idolatry and Superſtition once prevailed, and where the Knowledge of the Unity and Supremacy of God is now eſtabliſhed, which happy Change can only be aſcribed to the Propagation of the Goſpel, we ſhall ſee how fully and perfectly this great End was anſwered by the Miracles wrought by Chriſt.

If

If *Moſes* had a Commiſſion from God to publiſh his Will to the People of the *Jews*; Jeſus had a far more ample Commiſſion to publiſh the Terms of God's Salvation to all Mankind: And, as theſe Terms were of God's Appointment, and not ſuch as human Wiſdom could ſuggeſt, they ſtood in need of the Evidence of Miracles to ſupport them.

It has been obſerved before, That no Miracles can alter the clear Dictates of Natural Religion. The ſame may be ſaid with reſpect to any former divine Revelation: For to ſuppoſe a Revelation to come from God, and to be fully eſtabliſhed by Miracles, and that a later Revelation upon the like Proof and Authority ſhould abrogate and render the former void, would be ſetting up Miracle againſt Miracle, and deſtroy the Authority of both: And therefore, admitting the *Moſaic* Revelation and the Chriſtian to be both of divine Original, they muſt neceſſarily be conſiſtent, and each be in its proper Place to carry on the great and ultimate Views of Providence. This evidently was the Caſe of *Moſes*, who came to prepare the Way for the full and perfect Declaration of God's Will, reſerved till He ſhould come who was the End of the Law: And to this Purpoſe

are the Words of our bleſſed Saviour, *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not comē to deſtroy, but to fulfil. For verily I ſay unto you, Till Heaven and Earth paſs, one Jot or one Tittle ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the Law, till all be fulfilled.* Matt. v. 17, 18. And during the whole Courſe of his Miniſtry he conſtantly appealed to the Teſtimony of the Law and the Prophets: *Had you believed in Moſes*, ſays he to the *Jews, you would have believed me; for he wrote of me.* And his Apoſtle St. *Paul*, in his Defence before King *Agrippa*, gives this Account of the Goſpel he preached: *Having obtained Help of God, I continue unto this Day witneſſing both to Small and Great, ſaying none other Things than thoſe which the Prophets and Moſes did ſay ſhould come.* And indeed one Revelation admitted to be of divine Authority muſt be a Touchſtone to try all ſucceeding Revelations by: For God cannot contradict himſelf; and the great Works done by *Moſes* and by Chriſt are not only an Evidence of their divine Authority, but are a Bar to all ſucceeding Pretenders. The Miracles reported to have been done in the Heathen World are unworthy of God, conſidered either in themſelves, or the End propoſed

poſed by them: For let it be obſerved, that God never works Miracles merely to aſtoniſh and ſurprize People, but always to ſerve ſome great Ends of Providence: And though he has in favour of his People, and ſometimes even of particular Perſons, wrought a Miracle; yet, when he publiſhed the Law and the Goſpel, he did not reſt the Authority upon one or more ſingle Miracles, but upon a long Series of Miracles exhibited from Day to Day for Years together. And, if Miracles are properly applied as a Proof of the Purpoſes and the Will of God, Miracles wrought without being attended with any Declaration of God's Will in which we have any Concern, are very improper Inſtances to be ſet up in oppoſition to thoſe of *Moſes* and Chriſt, upon which the Happineſs of Mankind depends in this Life, and that which is to come. This Conſideration gives Weight and Authority to the Miracles of the Goſpel: For it was a Deſign worthy of God to reſtore Mankind to that Happineſs which they had forfeited: And it was a Work in every View of equal Dignity and Benevolence with the Creation: For, if God is adorable in the Work of the Creation, he is equally ſo in the Work of Redemption; and there is at

leaſt as much Goodneſs in making Men happy, as in making them at all.

With what Colour of Reaſon can the pretended Miracles of the Heathen World be brought into this Queſtion, which were done upon trifling Occaſions, unworthy of the Interpoſition of God? Look into all the antient Oracles; ſee to what mean Purpoſes they are applied, and how often they prove deſtructive to thoſe who relied on them; and then tell me what Marks you ſee of divine Wiſdom or Goodneſs in them, that ſhould ſet them upon an equal Foot with the Miracles of Chriſt Jeſus.

We read in the Old Teſtament of ſome Miracles wrought in behalf of particular People, and for particular Purpoſes: But neither are theſe, though of divine Authority, to be ſet in competition with the Miracles of the Goſpel: For they were not introductory to any Scheme of Religion, or new Declaration of God's Will, but are rather to be conſidered as Acts of Government, and ſuitable to the Character of God as King of *Iſrael*; for, where the Government itſelf was divine, no wonder to ſee the Meaſures of the Government to be of the ſame kind. And this Character of God being peculiar to the

Jews,

Jews, is the Reaſon why ſuch Miracles were frequent under the *Jewiſh* Law, and are very rarely to be met with under the Goſpel.

Secondly, I am to conſider what ſort of Works are to be admitted for Miracles in proving the Truth of any Religion.

The firſt Suſpicion that Men naturally have of any one who pretends to Prophecy or Inſpiration, is, that he has contrived the whole Matter himſelf: For we have ſeen many Viſions and Inſpirations impoſed on the Vulgar by Men of very bad Heads or very bad Hearts. And therefore the firſt Inquiry is, whether the Miracles might not proceed from human Art or Cunning.

And ſhall I undertake to prove, that it exceeds the Power of Man to raiſe the Dead to Life, to give Sight to the Blind, and to cure all Diſeaſes by the Word of his Mouth? No: Never was any ſuch Attempt ſet up. But perhaps no ſuch Miracles were ever really done, and the People were deceived by falſe Appearances. As for Inſtance; When the Man born blind was reſtored to Sight, he did not indeed recover his Eyes, but all the reſt of the People loſt theirs; which I think would be the greater Miracle of the two: For it is as eaſy to believe that the Word of

of Chriſt ſhould make one Man ſee, as that it ſhould make a thouſand blind.

But muſt they, you will ſay, of neceſſity proceed from God, becauſe they could not be wrought by Men? Were they Effects of nothing elſe but infinite Power?

The Miracles of the Goſpel, being ſuch Works as neither human Wiſdom or Power can perform, force us to have recourſe to a ſuperior inviſible Cauſe. But ſtill you will ſay, Can the Wit of Man diſcover all the different Orders of Beings between himſelf and his Creator, their Powers and Properties, ſo as with Security to affirm that no Being but the All-wiſe and All-mighty God could perform theſe wonderful Things; eſpecially conſidering that no Effects, neither the Miracles of the Goſpel, nor the Works of Nature, can prove directly an infinite Power or Wiſdom? For who will be bold to ſay that the Wiſdom and Power of God were exhauſted in the viſible Works of the Creation, ſo that there is nothing either wiſer or greater that infinite Wiſdom and Power can contrive or execute?

Let this Matter be rightly ſtated, and thus it will ſtand: The Works of Nature are certain Proofs of an All-powerful Cauſe; not becauſe

becauſe they appear to be Works of infinite Power, and ſuch as cannot be exceeded, but becauſe of neceſſity they prove in courſe of Argument a Firſt Cauſe of all Things; which Firſt Cauſe being unlimited, nothing is or can poſſibly be done, that the Power of the Firſt Cauſe cannot do. And therefore the Works of the Creation muſt be and are admitted as an infallible Proof of the Being of a God. Let it then be remembered, That a Revelation is not introduced to prove the Being of a God; That the Miracles of our Saviour were not wrought to that Purpoſe, but, ſuppoſing the Being of a God, to prove God the Author of the Revelation: And then it muſt be allowed, That, if we bring as good Arguments to prove God the Author of the Revelation, as can be brought to prove the Being of a God, all who believe the Being of a God are equally obliged to believe the Divinity of the Revelation.

The firſt and moſt natural Notion of God is, that he is the Maker of the World, and all Things in it. This was the Notion the *Jews* had of God; and, when they diſtinguiſhed the true God from the Heathen Gods, they defined him to be the Maker of the World and Mankind. Look then into the

the Miracles of the Goſpel, and you will ſee this Attribute of God as clearly demonſtrated by them as by the Works of Nature: For there you will find, that the Author of the Chriſtian Miracles is the Maker of Mankind; for by him Men were made; that is, dead Bodies were made into living Men: For to raiſe a dead Man, and to make a new Man, are much the ſame Thing. Any Matter may be formed even by human Art into the Shape of a Man; but it is adding Life that makes the Man. If we believe we received our Senſes, our Reaſon, our natural Strength and Vigour, from the true God at firſt; look into the Goſpel, and you will find the Miracles of Chriſt are from the ſame Hand: For to the Blind he gave Sight, to the Deaf Hearing, to the Lame and Sick Strength and Soundneſs, to Demoniacs and Lunatics he gave Reaſon and a right Mind. Or, if you chuſe rather to look into the material World for the Proof of a God; if you think the Beauty, Order, and Regularity of the World ſpeak God to be both Author and Governor of Nature; ſearch the Goſpel, and you will find the Miracles of Chriſt derive themſelves from the Governor of the World, and ſpeak the ſame Language with the Works

Works of Nature: For at his Word the ſtormy Winds were laid; the Sea obeyed his Voice: When he ſuffered, all Nature trembled; the Earth ſhook, the Vail of the Temple was rent, the Sun and the Moon were darkened: Which drew from the Centurion attending at his Execution the Confeſſion, *Truly this was the Son of God.* If you appeal to the natural Senſe and Notions of Mankind for the Idea of the true God, and thence collect his eſſential Attributes, Juſtice, Righteouſneſs, Holineſs, and Goodneſs; let the Voice of Nature be ſtill, and the Goſpel ſhall ſpeak more plainly, how juſt, how righteous, how holy and good God is, who is Author of the Salvation and Redemption which is by Chriſt Jeſus. Take what Way you will to prove the Being or the Attributes of God, and in the ſame Way with equal Advantage we will prove the God of the World, that is, the only true God, to be the Author of Chriſtianity; which all who believe the Being of a God are bound to admit for a Proof of the Truth of Chriſtianity: For either the Works of Nature are not a good Proof of the Being of a God; or the Works of the Goſpel, being of the ſame kind, and Effects of equal Power, muſt be

be allowed to prove God the Author of the Goſpel. And, when our Saviour ſtyled the Wonders that he performed, *the Works that the Father had given him to finiſh*, he plainly appealed to the Power of the Creator as manifeſted in the Works that bore witneſs to him: For, if any one elſe could have done the ſame Works, there would have been no Reaſon for calling them the Works of the Father, nor would there have been any Room for the Inference which our Saviour draws from it, *The Father himſelf, which hath ſent me, hath borne witneſs of me*, John v. 37.

There is a Queſtion commonly aſked upon this Occaſion, to which it may be proper to give an Anſwer: That is, How we know that theſe Miracles did not proceed from an evil Power, ſince we have Inſtances, as ſome think, of Miracles ſo wrought? The Anſwer is, We know this the ſame Way that any Man knows the Works of Nature to proceed from a good Being: For how do you know that the Creator of the World was a good Being? If you anſwer, that the Maker of Mankind, the Author of Nature, muſt of neceſſity be a good and holy Being, becauſe he has woven into the Nature of Man

Man the Love of Virtue and Hatred of Vice, and given him diſtinct Notions of Good and Evil, by which Reaſon unerringly concludes the Author of this Nature and theſe Principles to be himſelf good and holy; I anſwer the ſame for the Goſpel of Chriſt: The Love of Virtue, and Hatred of Vice, is as inſeparable from the Goſpel of Chriſt, as from the Reaſon of Man; and the Goſpel of Chriſt more diſtinctly teaches to know and acknowledge the Holineſs and Goodneſs of God, than Reaſon, or the Works of Nature, can do: And therefore thoſe who acknowledge the Author of Nature to be a good Being, have much more Reaſon to acknowledge the Author of the Chriſtian Miracles to be a good Being. But then we are told this is arguing in a Circle; proving the Doctrines firſt by Miracles, and then the Miracles again by the Doctrines. But this is a great Miſtake, and it lies in this; That Men do not diſtinguiſh between the Doctrines we prove by Miracles, and the Doctrines by which we try Miracles; for they are not the ſame Doctrines. God never wrought Miracles to prove the Difference between Good and Evil: And I ſuppoſe, if any Man were aſked how he proves Temperance or Chaſtity

to be Duties, Murder or Adultery to be Sins, he would not recur to Miracles for an Argument. Theſe and the like Duties are enforced in the Goſpel, but were always Truths and Duties before our Saviour's Coming: And we are in poſſeſſion of them without the Help of Miracles or Revelation. And theſe are the Doctrines by which we try the Miracles.

But the Doctrines which are to be proved by Miracles are the new revealed Doctrines of Chriſtianity, which were neither known or knowable to the Reaſon of Man: Such are the Doctrines of Salvation and Redemption by Chriſt, of Sanctification and Regeneration by the Spirit of God: And who ever yet brought theſe Doctrines to prove the Truth or divine Original of the Miracles?

I ſhall only add, that what has been ſaid it concerns thoſe chiefly to conſider, who hold faſt and admire the Principles of Natural Religion, but deſpiſe or overlook the Proofs of Chriſtianity. If they will but conſider the Tendency of their own Principles, they are not far from the Kingdom of God: For the ſame Reaſons, that oblige them to believe in God, oblige them to believe in Chriſt alſo. And, as we have one God the Father of all,

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ſo ſhould we have one Faith, and one Lord, even Jeſus Chriſt, the Saviour and Redeemer of us all. And let them take heed, that, having been made Partakers of ſo much Grace, to the Acknowledgment of the one true God, they fall not the more irrecoverably under Condemnation by obſtinately refuſing to acknowledge his only and eternal Son, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous.

DISCOURSE XI.

PSALM viii. 4.

What is Man, that thou art mindful of him? and the Son of Man, that thou viſiteſt him?

WHEN we conſider the Care of Providence over the Children of Men, as it is manifeſted either in the Works of Nature or of Grace, we naturally fall into the Reflection of the Text, and wonder to ſee ſo much done for Men, who ſeem to have no Merit or Deſert equal to the Concern ſhewed for them. If we look up to the Heavens, and view the Sun, Moon, and Stars, and conſider the Power by which theſe mighty Bodies were formed, the Wiſdom and Contrivance by which their Motions are regulated and adjuſted; we ſee plainly, by

the Benefit we receive from them, that they were intended for our Service: And yet what are we, that we ſhould be ſo ſerved? If we look round this Earth, the Place of our Habitation, we find it filled with many kinds of Creatures, and adorned by the bountiful Hand of Nature as if it were meant to be a Seat of Pleaſure and Happineſs; and we are ſure that this Part of the World, at leaſt, was made for the Benefit of Man: Here he is Lord, and has Dominion over the Works of God; for on Earth there is no Creature to rival him in Power or Wiſdom, or that can challenge any Share of Authority with him. But this Lord of the Earth, does he not come into it helpleſs? is he not wretched whilſt he is in it, and oftentimes miſerable when he is to go out of it? What muſt we ſay then? that this noble Palace was erected and adorned merely to be turned into an Hoſpital to receive the Blind and the Lame, the Diſeaſed in Body and Mind; to be the Seat of him *who is like a Thing of nought, and his Days like a Shadow that paſſeth away?*

If we go on from the Works of Nature to the Works of Grace, the ſame Reflection will purſue us ſtill. One would imagine, that Man, who had received ſo much from God, ſhould at leaſt continue to ſerve and

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obey his ſupreme Lord, and to acknowledge the Author of theſe great and good Gifts: So far from it, that God was in a manner expelled from his own Creation, and Stocks and Stones and the Beaſts of the Field were exalted and ſet up to receive the Honour and Worſhip due to the Creator. The Morality of the World became anſwerable to the Religion of it; and no Wonder: For why ſhould he not turn Brute himſelf, who can be content with a Brute for his God? The Wonder lies on the other Side, that God ſhould continue his Care and Concern for ſuch Creatures; that he ſhould be willing not only to forgive their Iniquities, but that he ſhould contrive the Means of their Redemption; and that in ſo wonderful a Manner, as to ſend his own Son into the World, not only to inſtruct and reform them, but to redeem them by making Atonement for their Sins by his own Blood. Who that conſiders this can help ſaying with the Pſalmiſt, *What is Man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that thou viſiteſt him?*

Though theſe Reflections ſhould naturally lead us to admire and adore the Goodneſs of God, who has done ſo much, when we deſerved ſo little; for what ſtronger Motive can there be for Gratitude, than undeſerved

Favour? yet have they oftentimes another Effect: For, when Men conſider that God does nothing without Reaſon, and at the ſame time ſee ſo little Reaſon why God ſhould do ſo much for them, they begin to ſuſpect whether he has done it or no, and to imagine that the whole Hiſtory of the Redemption is a cunningly deviſed Fable. To conſider the Son of God coming down from Heaven, living among Men, and at laſt ſhedding his Blood for them, fills them with Wonder and Aſtoniſhment: And when they look on the other Side, they can ſee nothing in Man that bears any Proportion to this Concern ſhewed for him, or that yields any Argument to juſtify the Wiſdom of God in this Method of his Redemption.

It muſt be owned, there is ſomething plauſible in this Way of reaſoning; and the more ſo, as it pretends to do Juſtice to the Wiſdom of God, and cannot be charged with any great Injuſtice done to the Character of Man. But this Prejudice, be the Foundation of it good or bad, lies as ſtrongly againſt the Works of Nature, as it does againſt the Works of Grace: For it is as hard to conceive that God ſhould create this World for the ſake of placing in it ſuch Creatures as we are, as it is to conceive that he ſhould

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ſend his Son to redeem us. If you can juſtify the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in making ſuch Creatures, it will be no hard Thing to juſtify his Wiſdom and Goodneſs in redeeming them: For to open a Way for Men to eſcape out of a State of Miſery is a more divine and beneficent Act, than the putting them into it. If you ſtumble at the Dignity of the Redeemer, and think that the Son of God was too great a Perſon to be concerned in ſaving Men; for the ſame Reaſon you ſhould think that God, or the Son of God, was too great a Perſon to be concerned in making ſuch Creatures as Men: And from theſe and the like Conſiderations you may as well conclude that God never made the World, as you do that he never redeemed it. But, in ſpight of all theſe Reaſons, you ſee plainly, that this Earth was made for the Habitation of Men, wicked and inconſiderable as they are. Since therefore your Conſequence will not hold in this Caſe, you have no Reaſon to depend on it in the other; but rather to think that, ſince it was agreeable to the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to exert his Power to make ſuch Creatures, it was alſo conſiſtent that he ſhould exert his Power to ſave and to redeem them.

It can ſerve to no good Purpoſe to give Men a great Opinion of themſelves, and of the conſiderable Figure they make in the Univerſe; nor can it be done with Truth and Juſtice. Experience, which ſhews us daily our own and the Follies of thoſe about us, will be too hard for all Reaſonings upon this Foot; and the Mind of Man, conſcious of its own Defects, will ſee through the Flattery, which aſcribes to it Perfections and Excellencies with which it feels itſelf to be unacquainted. Or, could a Man, in ſpight of his own Experience, be perſuaded to think himſelf very conſiderable, and worthy of all that God has done for him; this Opinion could tend only to make him proud and conceited, and to think the Diſpenſations of Providence with regard to himſelf to be rather Acts of Juſtice, and due to his Merit, than the Effects of Goodneſs and Benignity in the Governor of the World. Such an Opinion would in a great meaſure exclude a Senſe of Dependence, and in a greater ſtill a Senſe of Gratitude; which are vital and fundamental Principles in Religion.

But, if we ſet out with taking a proper View of ourſelves in the firſt place, and with conſidering the many Imperfections and Follies to which we are liable as rational Agents,

Agents; the many Weakneſſes and Infirmities, which ſurround us as animal Creatures; and then ſurvey the Works of Providence, and the great Care of God over us, manifeſted in his various Diſpenſations in the natural and moral World; we ſhall eaſily enter into the true Spirit of the holy Pſalmiſt's Reflection, *What is Man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that thou viſiteſt him?* It is a Reflection naturally proceeding from the Senſe of our Dependence on God, and leading to the higheſt Degree of Gratitude, whilſt we contemplate with Admiration the greateſt of his Favours, and conſider ourſelves as unworthy of his leaſt.

This is the natural Senſe which the Reflection in the Text ſuggeſts to us: Yet has it, as I obſerved before, been uſed to other Purpoſes; and ſome have thought it unworthy of God to ſuppoſe that in the great Works of Providence he had any ſpecial Regard to ſo inconſiderable a Part of the whole, as the Race of Men appears to be. The Objection, they think, grows ſtronger, when the Scheme of Providence diſplayed to us in the Goſpel of Chriſt for the Salvation of Man is laid before them; and it appears to them aſtoniſhing, that God ſhould intereſt himſelf ſo particularly in an Affair, which

ſeems, when compared to the whole, of ſo little Importance. If we aſcribe this great Work to the Divine Love and Goodneſs, it cannot be controverted that they are ſtrongly and evidently expreſſed and manifeſted in this Proceeding: too ſtrongly, it may be thought; ſince Divine Love and Goodneſs muſt be bounded by Divine Wiſdom, and can never degenerate into Fondneſs and Partiality; conſequently, his Love and Goodneſs can never do what his Wiſdom does not approve as fit to be done.

Upon this Foot it may be aſked, Where is the Wiſdom of erecting ſuch a Building as this for the Service of ſuch a Creature as Man? The Works of Nature are ſo immenſe and wonderful, that, if they are formed for the ſake of providing a proper Habitation for Man, the Houſe ſeems to be of far greater Dignity than the Maſter, and the End propoſed by no means to anſwer and juſtify the Means made uſe of. So again, in the Work of our Redemption, if the only Son of God came down from Heaven, and did and ſuffered all that is reported of him in the Goſpel; what is there in Man, conſidered in the moſt advantageous Light, that bears any Proportion to this wonderful Method made uſe of to ſave him, or to juſtify the Wiſdom of

of God in ſending the Lord of Power, and of the whole Creation, to die for the meaneſt, perhaps, of all intelligent Beings belonging to it?

Now, whether theſe Reflections upon our own weak and infirm Condition, and the low Rank we hold in the Order of intelligent Beings, be a ſufficient Ground for calling into queſtion the Credibility of the great Things ſaid to be done for us, is a Matter deſerving ſerious Conſideration. And

The firſt Queſtion we ſhould aſk ourſelves, is, whether we are proper Judges in this Matter? It is a great Undertaking to judge of the Wiſdom of God, and to ſay what is fit, or not fit, for Him to do; eſpecially where the Subject of the Inquiry is the Counſels of God in governing the natural and moral World; Points, not only of the higheſt Conſequence, but of all others the moſt removed out of our Sight.

In human Affairs we pretty well know the Powers and Abilities of Men, and can oftentimes judge of the Ends they propoſe to themſelves; and this Knowledge of their Powers, and this Ability to judge of the Ends they propoſe, qualifies us in many Caſes to eſtimate comparatively the Means and the End, and to diſcern whether the

Thing

Thing aimed at is worth the Expence or Labour employed in obtaining it. This Judgment cannot be made merely by conſidering and comparing the Means and the End together; but Conſideration likewiſe muſt be had of the Power and Ability of the Agent. The End of building a Houſe is for the Habitation of Men: But, whether the Houſe be too big, or too little, too magnificent, or not magnificent enough, can never appear from conſidering merely the End of building of an Houſe, which is for Men to dwell in; but you muſt take into the Account the Power, Station, Wealth, and other Circumſtances of the Builder, and then you may reaſonably ſay whether too much or too little Pains and Coſt have been beſtowed on it. To apply this to the preſent Caſe: When you view the Works of Nature, you think them too great and too magnificent to be intended for the Uſe of Man: But conſider a little, Who is the Builder? Is it not One of whoſe Power and Ability you cannot poſſibly judge? How do you know then that it was not as eaſy (and doubtleſs it was as eaſy) to God to produce this beautiful and wonderful Order of Things, as to have produced a much worſe, and more adapted, as you may imagine,

gine, to the Circumſtances of Man, the Inhabitant of this World? You cannot ſay, too much Pains, or too much Coſt, has been beſtowed: For all theſe Conſiderations are relative to the Power of the Agent; and, when the Agent has infinite Power, this Conſideration is wholly excluded.

But farther; In order to judge rightly in the Caſe before us, we ought perfectly to comprehend the End propoſed. If you ſee a great Building, but know not for what Uſe it was intended, nor what Uſe is made of it, it is impoſſible to judge whether it be too large, or too confined; for that Judgment muſt ariſe neceſſarily from knowing to what Purpoſe and to what Uſe it was erected. And where is the Man, who will pretend to know all the Ends of God in the Creation of the Univerſe? What relates to ourſelves we know tolerably well from Senſe and Experience: We feel the Influence of the heavenly Bodies, and are ſure that we are the better for them; but, that no others are beſides ourſelves, we can never be ſure.

Since then we know nothing of the Power of God but that it is infinite; the true Conſequence from which is, that all poſſible Things are equally eaſy to be effected

by his Hand; ſince the Purpoſes of God to be ſerved in the Creation of the Univerſe are various, and more than we can diſcover; probably more than we can even imagine; we act the abſurdeſt Part in the World, when we pretend to judge of the Works of Providence by comparing the Greatneſs of the Works of Nature with ſuch Ends and Purpoſes as we can diſcover to be ſerved by them: For, with reſpect to the infinite Power of God, we talk childiſhly, when we call his Works great, or little; and, with reſpect to the Ends and Purpoſes of Providence, ſuppoſing a juſt Meaſure of his Works were to be taken from thence, yet it is a Meaſure of which we are not Maſters.

As this Reaſoning muſt neceſſarily hold in the Works of Nature; ſo is it equally ſtrong, when applied to the Works of Grace. It is indeed a ſurprizing and wonderful Event, the Coming of the Son of God into this World, being made Man, and born of a pure Virgin, living and dying as a Man, to redeem Sinners. But what is there that ſhocks your Faith in this? You think perhaps the Means too great and too conſiderable to be made uſe of for the ſake of the End propoſed, which might have been obtained

tained at a cheaper Rate. But, when you ſay or think this, do you pretend to know by what other Way all the Purpoſes of God in ſending his Son into the World might have been anſwered? If you do not, poſſibly this was the only Way to anſwer all the Ends and Intentions of Providence in this great Work; and, if it was, the Means uſed were neceſſary, and therefore, without doubt, proper: And, ſuppoſing them proper, you will not ſurely be ſurprized, that God ſhould deſign, and his bleſſed Son undertake to perform what was proper to execute the wiſe Ends of Providence. It was indeed a very great Thing for a Man to be born of a Virgin: But in what Senſe was it great? only as being unuſual, and contrary to the eſtabliſhed Courſe, in our Eyes: With reſpect to God, I ſee no Reaſon to call it ſo. Were God to form a new Race under this new Law of Nature, that all ſhould be born of Virgins, I conceive, there would be nothing in it more wonderful than in the preſent eſtabliſhed Courſe of Nature.

It is more wonderful ſtill to think of the Son of God living on Earth in the Form and Faſhion of a Man: And, if we ſpeak in relation to our own Abilities of ſearching

into this myſterious Work, it is, and it ever muſt continue to be, a Wonder: But, with reſpect to God, have you any Reaſon to think this wonderful and myſterious, or a Thing difficult to be performed? God has united our Spirits, our Souls, to theſe Bodies: A wonderful, and a myſterious Thing it is to us: But can you imagine there is any Thing in the Works of God, that is wonderful, myſterious, or difficult in the Execution to Him? If not, how weakly do we amuſe ourſelves, when we ſet ourſelves with great Wiſdom to weigh the Works of God in our Scales, and to judge which are great and difficult in the Performance?

But this is not the only Miſtake Men are liable to, when they ſet themſelves up for Judges in this Matter. That the Redemption and Salvation of Men is the End of Chriſt's coming into the World, is certain, and is revealed in the Goſpel: But whoever ſhall ſay God had no other Purpoſe in view than this only, will judge haſtily, and, I doubt, raſhly. What relates to us immediately in this great Diſpenſation, God has been pleaſed to reveal to us diſtinctly; but he has no-where told us that we are the only Perſons concerned: That others probably are, may be collected from many

Intimations

Intimations in Scripture. Our bleſſed Redeemer has *all Power given him in Heaven* as well as in Earth: *Principalities and Powers*, the inviſible Powers, *are made ſubject to him*. And they cannot be thought to be unconcerned in that Work, for the ſake of which their King was exalted, and *every Knee* made *to bow* to him. How they are concerned, we know not: But this we know, that we are but a ſmall Part of the natural World. That there are many intelligent Beings beſides ourſelves, we know: That they may be numberleſs, we have Reaſon to believe: That God is the common Governor of all, is out of queſtion: That all his Diſpenſations in the moral Government of the World regard the whole, and will finally appear in the Eyes of every rational Creature to be juſt and equal, we have great Reaſon to conclude; and that God *will be juſtified in his Sayings, and clear when he is judged.* If this be ſo, the great Work of our Redemption, however immediately it relates to us, muſt be ſuppoſed adapted to anſwer the general Ends and Purpoſes of God's Government in the univerſal moral World. And this plainly ſhews, that we cannot judge of the Propriety of the Means made uſe of for redeeming the

World by conſidering only the Relation they have to Men; for probably they relate to others, and to other Purpoſes, and are, upon the whole, in every Reſpect proper and fit: But the Propriety cannot be diſcerned by us, nor will it, 'till we come into a clearer Light, and ſee the whole Scheme of Providence together.

You ſee then, upon the whole, that the Objections againſt God's Government in the natural and moral World, founded upon the Diſproportion between the Means made uſe of, and the Ends propoſed, are really the Effects of Shortſightedneſs, and of that great Propenſity which Men have to judge, though they want proper Materials to form a Judgment upon.

But let us conſider, whether the Obſervations, which have given riſe to theſe perverſe Reaſonings, will not, if duly attended to, open a Way to far other and far juſter Concluſions. That Men are weak and wretched, and not worthy of the Care of Providence over them, we know by ſad Experience; and have Reaſon enough, in this View, to fall into the Pſalmiſt's Reflection, *Lord! what is Man, that thou regardeſt him?* But ſtill moſt certain it is, that God does regard Man: All Nature bears

witneſs

witneſs to the Truth of this; for he is ſerved by the Works of Nature: And, though the Works of Nature may ſerve an hundred Purpoſes more, yet it cannot be doubted but that they were made to ſerve Man, though not him alone. This muſt appear upon the ſtricteſt Inquiry: For, conſidering this Solar Syſtem, of which we are a Part, we have no Reaſon to think but that it bears as great Proportion to the whole, as any other Syſtem: In this Syſtem our Earth is one conſiderable Part; and this Part was manifeſtly prepared for Man, who has Dominion over it. So that the human Race is no inconſiderable Part of the Creation in this Way of reckoning: And it is reaſonable to ſay, that the World was made, if not for him only, yet as much and as truly for him, as for others.

Being then poſſeſſed of this Fact, That, weak and infirm as we are, God has abundantly provided for us in this Life; and that, conſidered as Part of the natural World, we have a very full Proportion of good Things allotted to us; what Concluſion does it lead us to, if we conſider ourſelves as Part of the rational and moral World? Is it reaſonable to imagine, that God has taken ſo much Care of us in his natural Govern-

ment of the World, and that he will neglect us in the moral Part of it? that he regards us as Animals, but has no Regard to us as rational Agents? Can any Man think ſeriouſly of God, as a reaſonable, juſt, and upright Being, and ſuppoſe this to be the Caſe?

Now, theſe Conſiderations lay a Foundation for a juſt Expectation from the Goodneſs of God of his Aſſiſtance in our Caſe, where it is moſt wanted; that is, for his Aſſiſtance to us as rational and moral Beings, as capable of being happy or miſerable by Virtue or by Vice.

There is a Similitude and Proportion in all the Works of God: And it is reaſonable to infer, from the viſible Regard ſhewed to us in one Reſpect, the Regard had for us in all; eſpecially in the principal and moſt concerning Relation in which we ſtand towards him; that is, as rational Agents. And this leads us directly to ſuppoſe that God will provide for our Well-being as moral and religious Creatures, with a Care, at leaſt, equal to that ſhewn for us in our natural Capacity in this World.

Join now to this Preſumption what the Goſpel has expreſly revealed to us, and ſee whether

whether the whole is not of a piece, and conſiſtent.

The Goſpel tells us, that God has ſent his Son to redeem us: You wonder he ſhould take ſo much Trouble for ſuch Creatures: But is it not as becoming his Goodneſs to redeem us, as it was to make us? You will ſay perhaps, we are ſince that become Sinners. True; and yet ever ſince that he has preſerved us, and afforded us the Bleſſings of this Life: And is it not of a piece to open to us the Hopes of a better? Miſtake not my Meaning: I do not mean to infer from what God does for us in this World, that he is bound in Juſtice to do as much for us in reſpect to another. I know of nothing that he is bound in Juſtice to do for us. But ſurely it is ſafeſt Reaſoning upon the Ways of Providence from the manifeſt Works of Providence: And, by ſeeing how God has dealt with the Children of Men as Part and as Inhabitants of this natural World, it is reaſonable to conclude in what manner he will treat them as Part of the moral World. And, if we conſider what we ſee and know of the Works of Nature, and of the Good we enjoy from them, and compare them with the greater Works of Grace, as manifeſted

in the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus, we may eaſily diſcern the Conſiſtency and Harmony of God's Dealings in both Caſes; and ſee too, at the ſame time, that the Methods of Providence by which we hope to be ſaved, and which we have from Revelation, are liable to no other Objections, than the Methods of Providence by which we live, and which we ſee daily with our Eyes. In both Caſes the Works of God are indeed wonderful, and we unworthy of the leaſt of them: And we may juſtly ſay of both, *Lord! what is Man, that thou regardeſt him? and the Son of Man, that thou viſiteſt him?*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XII.

ACTS X. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his Mouth, and ſaid, Of a truth I perceive that God is no Reſpecter of Perſons: But in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.

THESE Words, if not carefully attended to, may ſeem to carry a Senſe contrary to the Meaning of the Apoſtle in delivering them. St. *Peter* in the Text declares, that God, without reſpect to any national or perſonal Privileges, was ready to admit all People into the Covenant made with Chriſt Jeſus, provided they were duly prepared for ſuch Admiſſion. Some from his Words have concluded that there is no

Neceſſity of becoming Diſciples of Chriſt, but that it is ſufficient if we live according to the Principles and Light of Nature; for-aſmuch as *every one who feareth God, and worketh Righteouſneſs, is accepted with him:* And thus ſupported, as they think, by one Paſſage of Scripture, they have been emboldened to deſpiſe and reject all the reſt as of no uſe to them, and to put their Salvation upon their own Strength, in oppoſition to the Method revealed and declared by the Son of God. This Error is common, as well as dangerous: And, ſince the great Regard which ſome pay to moral Virtue is purely Oppoſition to the Goſpel, it is worth while to examine this Paſſage of St. *Peter*, and to place his Meaning in a true Light, that the Doctrine of the Goſpel may not be overthrown by its own Authority.

The *Jews* had a Notion that the Bleſſings of the promiſed Meſſias were to be peculiar to themſelves, and not to be extended to any other Nation or People whatever, whom they looked on as Aliens from God, and not under his Care and Protection, as they were. Hence in the Prophets they plead their Privilege, and tell God, that he is not God of the Heathen, but of the People of *Iſrael:* Which Conceit of theirs St. *Paul* refers to and

and confutes in his Epiſtle to the *Romans*: *Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not alſo of the Gentiles? yes, of the Gentiles alſo.* The Diſciples of our Lord, and eſpecially St. *Peter*, were as deep in this Opinion as others; and, during our Saviour's Abode on Earth, they were confirmed in it by what they obſerved in him: He declared, *he was not ſent but to the loſt Sheep of the Houſe of Iſrael:* And, when he ſent out his Diſciples to preach, he expreſly charged them *not to go into the Way of the Gentiles, nor to enter into any City of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the loſt Sheep of the Houſe of Iſrael:* And after his Reſurrection, when he enlarged their Commiſſion, and bade them *Go, teach all Nations;* they underſtood him not, but were inquiſitive about *his reſtoring the Kingdom to Iſrael.* After the Aſcenſion the Apoſtles continued at *Jeruſalem* preaching to their own Nation, till, upon the Perſecution of St. *Stephen*, many fled into other Parts; and, though they went as far as *Phenice*, *Cyprus*, and *Antioch*, yet they *preached the Word to none but Jews only*, Acts xi. 19. And when St. *Peter*, admoniſhed by an heavenly Viſion, had admitted ſome Gentiles into the Church of Chriſt through Baptiſm, he was called to an account for it by the Apoſtles and

Brethren

Brethren who were in *Judea*; Chap. xi. 1: Nor were they ſatisfied, till he told them what Viſion he had ſeen, what alſo *Cornelius* had ſeen, and in what a miraculous Manner the Holy Ghoſt was poured forth on the Gentiles, before he ventured to baptize them: And then, under the Aſtoniſhment of this Conviction, they held their peace, blaming his Behaviour no longer; but glorified God, ſaying, *Then hath God alſo unto the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life*, Acts xi. 18. St. *Peter* himſelf was equally ſurprized, when he found, by comparing *Cornelius*'s Viſion with his own, that God had determined to admit the Gentiles, as well as the *Jews*, into the Church of Chriſt; and he expreſſes himſelf in the ſame Manner, though not juſt in the ſame Words, with the Apoſtles and Brethren. They ſay, *Then hath God alſo unto the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life.* St. *Peter* ſays, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no Reſpecter of Perſons: But in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.* Theſe two Reflections, as they are made upon the ſame Caſe, one by St. *Peter*, when he was with *Cornelius*, the other by the Apoſtles and Brethren, when St. *Peter* related the Story of *Cornelius*, ſo are they in ſubſtance the ſame: And St.

Peter, when he ſays *that in every Nation he that feareth God — is accepted with him*, and the Apoſtles and Brethren, when they ſay *that God hath granted to the Gentiles Repentance unto Life*, mean one and the ſame Thing: And therefore, in the Text, *to be accepted with God* means no more than to have from God the Offer of *Repentance unto Life*; and both certainly mean our having Admiſſion into the Covenant with God through Chriſt Jeſus. So that the whole of what St. *Peter* ſays in the Text amounts to this: "I now at length perceive that God "has not confined his Mercies to a particular "Nation only; but that all are capable of "inheriting the Promiſes in Chriſt Jeſus, "who are duly prepared by Righteouſneſs, "and the Fear of God."

This will farther appear to be the true Interpretation, if we examine the Caſe of *Cornelius*, and what the Acceptance was that he found. *Cornelius* was a Gentile, and one of the beſt of them; *a devout Man, and one who feared God with all his Houſe, which gave much Alms to the People, and prayed to God alway*: And yet his Goodneſs did not make it unneceſſary for him to become a Chriſtian. The heavenly Viſion was not ſent to ſatisfy him that his Righteouſneſs was ſufficient, and

that

that he had no need to look out for farther Aſſiſtance or Direction: On the contrary, it was ſent to inform him where he might ſeek and find a proper Inſtructor. St. *Peter* had alſo a Viſion to prepare him to do the Duty of an Apoſtle to the Gentile Centurion; and, when this devout Man came to him, in obedience to the heavenly Warning, he inſtructs him in the Faith of Chriſt Jeſus, and baptizes him with Water: Upon which St. *Peter* ſays, he finds that Men of all Nations, who do righteouſly, are accepted with God. He could not poſſibly mean, That thoſe who did their beſt upon the Light of Nature, had no need of any other Teacher: That Reflection could never riſe from the Caſe before him: For why did he then inſtruct *Cornelius* in the Knowledge of Chriſt, and baptize him in his Name? St. *Peter* therefore certainly meant, That all Gentiles duly prepared were capable of the Bleſſings of the Goſpel through the Mercy of God; in oppoſition to his former Error, That none but *Jews* had ſuch a Privilege. And the Apoſtle undoubtedly underſtood that the beſt of the Gentiles had need of the Goſpel; or elſe his Commendation of the Goodneſs of God amounts to this only, That he perceived that God would give to the honeſt-minded

minded Gentiles, who feared him, and did righteouſly, that which they had no occaſion to receive.

From the Words and Circumſtances of the Text thus explained we learn what is the true Notion of that Acceptance, which St. *Peter* ſays the Gentiles of all Nations are intitled to through the Mercy of God.

But then there ariſes a Difficulty from the Terms to which St. *Peter* has limited this Privilege: For he does not ſay that Men of all Nations are accepted of God; but that in every Nation *he that feareth God, and worketh Righteouſneſs*, is accepted of him. Now, one great End of the Chriſtian Religion being to inſtruct us in the Fear of God, and in Works of Righteouſneſs, it may ſeem ſtrange, that, in order to the obtaining of this Benefit of being duly inſtructed in the Fear of God, and in Works of Righteouſneſs, it ſhould be required, as a previous Condition, that we ſhould fear God, and do righteouſly: Which Condition ſuppoſes us already in poſſeſſion of the main Thing for which the Privilege itſelf is granted; and, conſequently, the Privilege becomes in a manner uſeleſs by our having the Qualifications neceſſary to the obtaining it. To clear this Matter, we muſt conſider what the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* teaches us,

Chap.

Chap. xi. 6; *Without Faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God: For he that cometh to God, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him:* The Meaning of which is, That a Man cannot offer himſelf to God, much leſs enter into the Covenant of his Mercy, without a firm Perſuaſion of his Being, and a due Notion of his Attributes. He muſt know *that he is*; otherwiſe he can never move or advance towards him: He muſt know alſo *that he is a Rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him*; or elſe he cannot be encouraged to move towards him: Which two Articles of Belief infer a juſt Fear of God as the ſupreme Governor of the World, and a Deſire to pleaſe him as the Diſpenſer of Rewards and Puniſhments according to the Good or Evil which Men do. This is the Faith, without which, the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* ſays, 'tis impoſſible to pleaſe God: This is the Faith, with which, St. *Peter* ſays, the Men of every Nation are accepted with him. And in truth theſe Qualifications are ſo neceſſary to a Man's being accepted with God, and admitted into the Covenant of his Grace through Jeſus Chriſt, that without them the Goſpel cannot be ſo much as tendered to him: For upon what Foot would you preſs Men to become Chriſtians

Chriſtians in order to obtain the Mercy of God, who have no Senſe of the Fear of God, and, conſequently, no Concern about pleaſing or diſpleaſing him? The Goſpel does not teach, but ſuppoſe this Doctrine: And, was even an Apoſtle to preach to a Nation perfectly ignorant of God, he muſt lay by the Goſpel, and firſt convince the People from Reaſon and Nature of the Being of God, and the Neceſſity of Righteouſneſs in order to deſerve his Favour, before he could invite them to embrace the Goſpel as the perfect Rule of Righteouſneſs preſcribed and ordained by God himſelf. And therefore, when St. *Peter* ſays, *that in every Nation he that feareth God, and worketh Righteouſneſs, is accepted of him*, he is not to be underſtood as limiting the Mercies of God to certain Perſons of the beſt Character, but rather as declaring the natural Order of Things. It is frequently taught, that our Lord came to ſave Sinners; and therefore he began his Preaching with an Exhortation to Repentance in the ſame Words that *John* the Baptiſt had done before him, *Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*: Which is as much as if he had ſaid, Turn to God, and fear him, working Righteouſneſs, that

that ye may be made Members of the Kingdom of his Son, which now approaches.

But, ſhould the Caſe of *Cornelius*, *who was a devout Man, fearing God with all his Houſe, giving much Alms, and praying alway*, from which Caſe St. *Peter* makes the Reflection contained in the Text, incline us to believe that he means a greater Degree of Goodneſs by fearing God, and working Righteouſneſs, than was commonly to be found; and, conſequently, that what St. *Peter* ſays can be applied only to the moſt virtuous and beſt-diſpoſed Heathens; upon this Suppoſition, both the Caſe of *Cornelius*, and the Declaration of St. *Peter*, evidently prove, that the beſt of Men ſtand in need of the Aſſiſtances of the Goſpel of Chriſt to make themſelves ſecure of obtaining the End of their Hopes, Glory and Immortality, from God, who is the Rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him. I would deſire thoſe who are of a different Opinion, and think that they have no Reaſon to trouble their Heads about the Chriſtian Religion, provided they lead good moral Lives, to conſider the Character of *Cornelius*: He was devout, and feared God with all his Houſe: He was very charitable, and gave much Alms to the People, and prayed

prayed to God continually. This, I ſuppoſe, they will allow to be a Deſcription of ſuch a moral Man as they mean: And I would aſk then, For what Purpoſe did God ſend a Viſion to *Cornelius*, and another to St. *Peter*, that *Cornelius* might be made a Chriſtian? Was all this Care thrown away upon a mere unneceſſary Point, that might as well have been let alone? Was *Cornelius* thus called to the Profeſſion of the Goſpel, and was it of no Conſequence whether he had been called, or no? If God made choice of *Cornelius*, one of the beſt of the Gentiles, to ſhew that ſome of them were capable of his Grace, he did at the ſame time demonſtrate that all had need of it: For, if the beſt, with all the Light they enjoyed, wanted this Aſſiſtance, what could the worſt do without it?

It may be aſked perhaps, What would have become of *Cornelius*, had he died, as he had ſome time lived, a devout Gentile, in the Fear of God, full of Alms and of Prayers, without having been called to the Knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus? Which Queſtion, if purſued through all its Views, would open a large Field of Diſcourſe, but ſuch as would afford rather Speculation than Profit; ſince the Caſe, however determined, could no way

affect us, who have been called to the Knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus. Let it then be taken for granted, that *Cornelius*, had he died in the Circumſtances before deſcribed, would have found Reſt to his Soul from the Mercy and Goodneſs of God: And let this other Queſtion be conſidered, which is much more to our Purpoſe, What would have been the Caſe of *Cornelius*, if he had rejected the Call, refuſed to hearken to St. *Peter*, and had inſiſted on his own Merit and Virtue, in oppoſition to the Grace that was offered him through the Goſpel? Would ſuch a Refuſal have been a pardonable Error? Could he have maintained the Character of one fearing God with all his Houſe, after ſuch an open Contempt of the Divine Call? Could he ever have prayed more to God to guide and direct his Way, after he had abſolutely denied to be guided and directed by Him? Would even his Alms have been an acceptable Offering to the Almighty, after he had renounced that Obedience which is better than Sacrifice, and which is the only Thing that can ſanctify our imperfect Works? If Reaſon and Natural Religion teach us that it is our Duty to pleaſe and to obey God, what Part even of Natural Religion could this Centurion have exerciſed,

after

after he had ſolemnly rejected the Counſel of God, and followed his own Will in oppoſition to that of his Maker declared in the heavenly Viſion? As bad as this ſuppoſed Caſe of *Cornelius* would have been, it is the very Caſe of thoſe who, having been betimes inſtructed in the Knowledge of the Goſpel, and called to the Faith and Obedience of Chriſt Jeſus, do deſpiſe and reject that Faith under the Colour of preſerving the Purity of Natural Religion, and living according to the Dictates of Reaſon and Morality. It makes no Difference in the Caſe, that their Call has been through the ordinary Adminiſtrations of the Church, and that *Cornelius*'s was by a Viſion directed to himſelf: The Voice of God is the ſame, whether he ſpeaks by his Apoſtles, or by his Angels: Whoever acts by the Appointment of God, ſpeaks with his Authority: And, the regular Powers of the Church being ordained by him, when the Church ſpeaks to her Children conformably to the Commiſſion received, 'tis the Voice of God calling Men to Repentance unto Life through Chriſt Jeſus. And, whatever the Condition of thoſe may be who have never heard of the Lord who bought them, ours is certainly very bad, if, having heard of

him, we reject and deſpiſe him. 'Tis one Thing not to believe in Chriſt, becauſe we know him not; 'tis another to know him, and to diſbelieve him. Though ſuch Ignorance may be an Excuſe, yet ſuch Knowledge muſt be Condemnation.

DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW xxii. 40.

On theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

THE two Commandments here refered to are ſet down in the Verſes immediately preceding the Words of the Text. At Verſe 37 we read, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind. This is the firſt and great Commandment*, Verſe 38. At Verſe 39 follows, *And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* Then come the Words of the Text, *On theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets:* The Meaning of which Saying is plainly this, That the whole Reaſon of

Religion lies in theſe two general Commandments; That in theſe all particular Duties and Precepts are founded; That nothing can be of any Obligation in Religion, but as it relates either to the Love we owe to God, or the Love we owe to our Neighbour. In ſpeaking to theſe Words, I ſhall,

Firſt, Shew you the true Meaning and Import of them; and,

Secondly, Make ſome uſeful Remarks on the whole.

In St. *Mark*'s Goſpel the ſame Thing is ſaid in different Words, though to the ſame Effect. The Words parallel to the Text are theſe; *There is none other Commandment greater than theſe*, Mark xii. 31: That is, There is nothing in Religion of an higher Obligation than theſe two Precepts: All the Duties of Religion muſt be governed by theſe two Principles: Beyond them there is nothing greater, nothing to limit or reſtrain them; but by them muſt every thing elſe be limited and reſtrained. The Reaſon of this is plain: For, the Relation between God and Man being once known, the firſt Concluſion is, *That we ought to love the Lord our God with all our Hearts, with all our Souls, and with all our Minds*; that is, to the utmoſt of our Power: And, until this general Principle be

be eſtabliſhed, the particular Duties owing to God cannot fall under our Conſideration. There is no room to inquire after the proper Inſtances of expreſſing our Love to God, till the general Obligation of loving God be known and admitted. The ſame Reaſon holds likewiſe as to the other general Head of Religion, *the Love of our Neighbour*: For, the Relation between Man and Man, and the common Relation of all to one great Maſter, being ſuppoſed, the Reſult is, That we ought *to love our Neighbour as ourſelf*; that is, to do all we can to promote the Happineſs of each other: And, unleſs we have this general Senſe, we cannot be concerned to know in any particular Caſe what is the proper Inſtance of Love which we ought to ſhew towards our Neighbour.

But, theſe general Principles being once eſtabliſhed, the particular Duties flow from them naturally. The Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour, if carefully attended to, will eaſily grow into a complete Syſtem of Religion. The Duties of Religion are all relative, regarding either God or Man; and there is no relative Duty that Love does not readily transform itſelf into upon the mere View of the different Circumſtances of the Perſons concerned. Love, with regard to a

Superior, becomes Honour and Reſpect, and ſhews itſelf in a chearful Obedience and a willing Submiſſion to the Commands of Authority: Love, with reſpect to our Equals, is Friendſhip and Benevolence: Towards Inferiors 'tis Courteſy and Condeſcenſion: If it regards the Happy and Proſperous, 'tis Joy and Pleaſure, which Envy cannot corrupt: If it looks towards the Miſerable, 'tis Pity and Compaſſion; 'tis a Tenderneſs which will diſcover itſelf in all the Acts of Mercy and Humanity.

In negative Duties this Principle is no leſs effectual than in poſitive. Love will not permit us to injure, oppreſs, or defraud our Brother: It will not give us leave to neglect our Betters, or to deſpiſe our Inferiors: It will reſtrain every inordinate Paſſion, and not ſuffer us either to gratify our Envy at the Expence of our Neighbour's Credit and Reputation, or our Luſt by violating his Wife or his Daughter; but it will preſerve us harmleſs and innocent: For *Love worketh no Ill to its Neighbour.* This Deduction of particular Duties from this general Principle was made by St. *Paul* long ſince: *Owe no Man,* ſays he, *any thing, but to love one another: For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law. For this, Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery, Thou ſhalt not kill,*

kill, Thou ſhalt not ſteal, Thou ſhalt not bear falſe Witneſs, Thou ſhalt not covet: And, if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf. Love worketh no Ill to his Neighbour: Therefore Love is the Fulfilling of the Law. Rom. xiii. 8, &c.

This Notion of Love, as being the Fulneſs of the Law, and of all the Commandments being comprehended in this Saying, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf*, will lead us to the true and natural Interpretation of a Paſſage in St. *James*, which, as it is commonly underſtood, is liable to great Difficulties and Objections, and to thoſe who have plain Senſe, and can follow it, muſt appear abſurd: *Whoſoever*, ſays he, *ſhall keep the whole Law, and offend in one Point, he is guilty of all*, Chap. ii. Ver. 10. This is a Poſition ſomething ſtrange, that an Offence againſt one Law ſhould be a Breach of all Laws, however different they are in Kind and Degree; that he who commits Adultery, for Inſtance, ſhould therefore be guilty of Murder and Robbery, and other the like heinous Offences nothing related to the Sin of Adultery. But let us conſider the Apoſtle's Reaſon in the next Verſe: *For he that ſaid, Do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do*

not kill. Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law. This Reaſon, as Interpreters commonly expound it, amounts to this: All Laws are founded upon one and the ſame Authority of God; therefore every Offence againſt any Law is a Contempt of the Authority upon which all Laws depend; and therefore every Act of Diſobedience is a Breach of the whole Law, becauſe ſubverſive of that Authority upon which the whole Law ſtands. But there are many Objections againſt the Reaſon thus ſtated: Firſt, 'Tis liable evidently to all the Difficulties of the *Stoics'* Paradox, That all Offences are equal: For, if the Guilt of Sin depends, not upon the Nature and Circumſtances of the ſinful Action, but upon the Authority of the Law-giver, then every Sin, being an Offence againſt the ſame Authority, is of the ſame Guilt and Heinouſneſs; and there will be no Difference between killing your Neighbour and your Neighbour's Horſe; for he that has forbid you killing your Neighbour, has likewiſe forbid you doing any Act to the Hurt and Detriment of your Neighbour. Secondly, The Apoſtle's Inference in the latter Part of the Verſe does not anſwer to the Principle laid down in the former Part:

He

He that ſaid, Do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill. This is his Principle; and he infers, *Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law:* No doubt of it; becauſe there is a Law againſt Murder as well as againſt Adultery. But what is this towards ſhewing that the Breach of one Law is the Breach of all? The Inference therefore ſhould have been upon this Foot: Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art guilty of all the Laws by diſobeying the Author of all Laws.

But this Paſſage of St. *James* will have another Appearance, when fairly examined. In order to it, we muſt look back to that which gave occaſion to it, and follow the Apoſtle's Argument ſtep by ſtep. The whole depends upon the Notion, which is common to the Writers of the New Teſtament, That *Love is the Fulfil'ing of the Law.* St. *James* conſiders the whole Duty of Man to Man as contained in one Law, namely, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf:* And then he argues rightly, he who offends in one Point is guilty of the whole Law: For, whether it be Theft, or Murder, or Adultery, that you commit, it matters not; for any of theſe Crimes is inconſiſtent with the Law, which

contains and is the whole, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* But hear the Apoſtle's own Words: In the eighth Verſe you read thus, *If ye fulfil the Royal Law according to the Scripture, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf, ye do well:* Where, Firſt, you are to obſerve, that he calls this the Royal Law, not becauſe given by Chriſt the King, as ſome tell us, for all Laws are in that Senſe Royal Laws; but becauſe 'tis the firſt ſupreme Law, from which all others proceed, as diſtinct Branches, and by which they muſt all be governed. Secondly, You muſt take notice what Streſs the Apoſtle lays upon their *fulfilling* this Royal Law: *If ye fulfil the Royal Law,—ye do well:* That is, If you attend to it in all Inſtances, ſo as not to offend againſt it in any Caſe, ye then will do well. The Apoſtle proceeds in the next Verſe, *But, if ye have reſpect to Perſons, ye commit Sin, and are convinced of the Law as Tranſgreſſors.* The Law in this Verſe is the ſame Law that was mentioned before, that is, the Royal Law: If, ſays he, you have any partial Regards, you will not then fulfil the Law of Love, but will be found to be Tranſgreſſors of that Law: *For*, as it follows in the tenth Verſe, *whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.* In this

this Verſe he conſiders the Royal Law, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf*, as the whole Law; and all particular Commandments, as Points of that Law. And what he ſays amounts to this? Whatever Regard you may have to the Law of loving your Neighbour, which all profeſs to walk by, yet aſſure yourſelves you cannot keep that Law, if you offend againſt any one Rule of Charity; for every ſuch ſingle Offence is a Breach of that whole Law, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf*. In the eleventh Verſe he gives the Reaſon of his Aſſertion: *For he that ſaid, Do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill.* The Words in the Original, here tranſlated *for he that ſaid*, are of doubtful Interpretation. The Senſe followed by Interpreters and Tranſlators has miſled People in the underſtanding of this whole Place. Inſtead of *for he that ſaid*, it ſhould be rendered, for *the Law* which ſaid, *Do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill.* The Place thus rendered contains a clear Reaſon of what went before: If, ſays he, you offend in any Point of Charity or Duty, you become a Tranſgreſſor of this whole Law, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf:* For this Law of loving thy Neighbour, which ſays to thee, *Do not commit Adultery*, ſays likewiſe to thee;

Do

Do not kill. And now, if you go to the latter Part of the Verſe, you will find it exactly ſuited to the whole Thread of Diſcourſe which went before: For thus it follows, *Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law*; that is, of that general Law of of loving thy Neighbour, which ſaid as well to thee, *Thou ſhalt not kill*, as, *Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery.*

How this Royal Law ſpeaks to us in the Language of all particular Laws and Precepts, is eaſily underſtood, and is diſtinctly explained by St. *Paul* in the Place already produced: *For this, Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery, Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not ſteal, Thou ſhalt not bear falſe Witneſs, Thou ſhalt not covet: And, if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* Rom. xiii. 9.

As to the different Verſion of the eleventh Verſe in St. *James*, which I have made choice of, our own Tranſlators plainly ſaw the Propriety of it, and have given that Verſion in the Margin of the Bible. To them therefore, and their Reaſoning, I refer you.

This

This Place in St. *James* being thus underſtood and explained, there is no Occaſion for any Niceties or Diſtinctions to ſupport the Reaſon and Equity of his Doctrine, or to ſhew how a Man, by offending againſt one Law, may become guilty of all; ſince this Aſſertion will no longer be found to be Part of the Apoſtle's Doctrine. What he teaches is plainly this: The great and fundamental Law of the Goſpel is this, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* The Force of this all ſee, and all acknowledge; and, whilſt they pretend to be Chriſtians, all muſt pretend at leaſt to obey. But, ſays he, whoever in any Manner offends, injures, or oppreſſes his Brother, it matters not in what Way, whether it be by undue and partial Preference of one to another, by Contempt, or Slander, by Theft, Adultery, or Murder: Whoever, I ſay, in any of theſe Inſtances ſins againſt his Brother, will be found to be a Tranſgreſſor againſt this great, this vital Principle of Religion, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* For this Reaſon he tells them, the Way to do well was *to fulfil the Royal Law*; that is, to obſerve all the Points of it; becauſe no Point could be tranſgreſſed, but the Tranſgreſſor muſt be found guilty of the whole Law, which

which is a general Law of Love extending to all Points. There is nothing hard in this Senſe, nothing but what any Man may ſee the Reaſon of: For certainly to injure our Neighbour in any Way makes us guilty of the Breach of the Law, which commands us to love our Neighbour; for one injurious Action is as inconſiſtent with Love as another; and in this reſpect injurious Actions have no Difference, for they are all equally inconſiſtent with the Great Law.

The giving Light to this Paſſage in St. *James* has not miſled us from the main Purpoſe of this Diſcourſe; for we have ſeen at the ſame time the true Extent and Meaning of the Text, with reſpect to one of the Laws refered to in it, and which is eaſily applicable to the other. St. *James* has fully taught us our Saviour's Meaning, when he ſaid, *On theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*

But let us turn to conſider the other general Head refered to by our Saviour in the Text, namely, *the Love of God. This*, ſays our Lord in the thirty-eighth Verſe, *is the firſt and great Commandment.* From this Head are to be deduced all the Service, Worſhip, and Honour, which we owe and pay

to

to our Creator. I obſerved to you before, that all the Duties of Religion are relative: Which is true in that Part now under Conſideration; for the Duties we owe to God are founded in the Relation between God and us. Were there no ſuch Relation, the Perfections of God might be Matter of Admiration, but could not be the Ground of Duty and Obedience. I obſerved likewiſe to you, that Love naturally transforms itſelf into all relative Duties, which ariſe from the Circumſtances of the Perſons related. Thus, in the preſent Caſe, if we love God, and conſider him as the Lord and Governor of the World, our Love will ſoon become Obedience: If we conſider him as wiſe, good, and gracious, our Love will become Honour and Adoration: If we add to theſe our own natural Weakneſs and Infirmity, Love will teach us Dependence, and prompt us in all our Wants to fly for Refuge to our great Protector: And thus in all other Inſtances may the particular Duties be drawn from this general Principle. Prayer and Praiſe, and other Parts of Divine Worſhip, which are the Acts of theſe Duties, are ſo clearly connected to them, that there is no need of ſhewing diſtinctly concerning them, how they flow from this general Commandment.

Having thus given you an Account of the Text with reſpect to both the Principles of Religion refered to in it, *the Love of God*, and *the Love of our Neighbour*, I would now, in the ſecond Place, lay before you ſome Obſervations which ſeem to ariſe naturally from the whole.

The firſt is, That theſe two Principles, from which our Lord tells us all Religion flows, muſt be conſiſtent with one another; otherwiſe they could not both be Principles of the ſame Religion. The Love of God therefore can in no Caſe oblige us to act contrary to the Love of our Neighbour. Our Saviour has told us indeed, that the Time would be, when ſome ſhould think they did God good Service by deſtroying their Brethren: But I don't find the Religion or the Zeal of thoſe Perſons much commended; but this very Character is given of them to ſhew how little they knew or underſtood their Duty. And yet, could ſuch a Caſe ever happen, in which it might become our Duty to hurt our Neighbour in order to promote the Honour of God, it could not be a juſt Character of falſe Zeal, to ſay that it made Men think they did God good Service by deſtroying or abuſing their Neighbour; becauſe, upon this Suppoſition, it might happen

happen to be the Character of true religious Zeal.

There is one Thing in our Saviour's Argument which may perhaps miſlead Men in judging upon this Caſe, and which therefore may deſerve to be particularly conſidered. Of the Love of God our Saviour ſays, *it is the Firſt and Great Commandment:* The Love of our Neighbour he ſtyles *the Second, like unto it.* Now from hence perhaps it may be infered, That the Love of God, which is the Firſt and Great Commandment, is a Law of a ſuperior Obligation to that which is only the Second, and may therefore in ſome Inſtances controul and overrule it. From whence it would follow, That we might lawfully overlook the Love of our Neighbour, in obedience to the ſuperior Obligation we are under to love God. Now, upon ſuppoſition that our Duty to God and our Neighbour could ever interfere, I ſhould readily allow that we ought to love God rather than Man: But our Saviour's ſaying the Love of God is the Firſt Commandment, is no manner of Reaſon to think that it ever is, or can be, inconſiſtent with the Second.

The Love of God is properly ſtyled the Firſt Commandment, in reſpect to God who is the Object of the Love, and becauſe it is

indeed the Foundation of all Religion, even of that Commandment which is ſtyled the Second. But this is ſo far from ſhewing that the Love of God may ever claſh with the Love of our Neighbour, that it proves the contrary; for, if the Love of our Neighbour is deducible from the Love of God, it muſt ever be conſiſtent with it.

I know very well that the antient Writers of Morality have not gone higher for Principles to build their Precepts on, than to the common Deſires of Nature, and the ſeveral Relations of Man to Man: But that is their Fault; for they might have looked farther with very good Succeſs: For, if we conſider God as the common Father of Mankind, and (as from his Goodneſs and Impartiality we muſt needs judge) equally concerned for the Welfare of all his Children, we ſhall have a very ſure Foundation for all the moral Duties. No Man, who thinks himſelf bound to love and obey God, can think himſelf at liberty to hurt or oppreſs thoſe whom God has taken under his Care and Protection: No Man, who believes it his Intereſt as well as his Duty to pleaſe God, but muſt likewiſe believe it his Intereſt and Duty to be kind and tender towards thoſe who are the Children of God, and in whoſe Happineſs

he is not an unconcerned Spectator. For this Reaſon the Love of God is called the Firſt and Great Commandment; and for this Reaſon it never can be inconſiſtent with the Love of our Neighbour, which is the Second. In all Caſes therefore where your Duty to your Neighbour is plain and clear, depend upon it your Duty to God concurs with it. All Scruples to the contrary are wicked: Perhaps wicked Hypocriſy; for it is the greateſt Indignity to God to uſe his Name, and pretend his Honour, to cover the Injuries you are doing to his Creatures, and your own Brethren.

The ſecond Obſervation I would make from the Text is, That, our Saviour having declared *that on theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*, 'tis certain that nothing is or ought to be eſteemed Religion, that is not reducible to one or other of theſe Principles.

But what then, you will ſay, muſt become of the Inſtitutions of Religion, which, conſidered in themſelves, and according to their own Nature, are not properly to be refered either to the Love of God, or our Neighbour? For, if all that is Religion may be ſo refered, it ſhould ſeem that theſe Inſtitutions, which cannot be ſo refered, are no Part of

Religion. It is certain that mere poſitive Inſtitutions are not founded upon any moral Reaſon of the Actions themſelves: If they were, they might eaſily be drawn from theſe general Precepts without the Help of a poſitive Command: For the whole moral Reaſon of Religion is either the Love of God, or the Love of our Neighbour; and to make any thing elſe to be Religion, ſtrictly ſpeaking, that does not partake of this moral Reaſon, is Ignorance and Superſtition. But then there is a very manifeſt Difference between Religion and the Means of Religion: And whatever is Part of our Religion, and yet not ſo upon the account of the moral Reaſon, can only be eſteemed as a Means of Religion; not ordained for its own ſake, but for the ſake of that Religion which is founded upon moral Reaſon.

This Diſtinction between Religion and the Means of Religion would be of uſe, if carefully attended to: It would teach Men where to point their beſt Endeavour, and where to place their Hopes and Expectations: For, if your Zeal and Fervor be ſpent only upon the Means of Religion, and goes no farther, ye are ſtill in your Sins.

And from hence it is plain, that there can be no Competition between the Duties called

Moral,

Moral, and thoſe called Poſitive: For, if the poſitive Duties are the Means and Inſtruments appointed by God for preſerving true Religion and Morality, true Religion and Morality can never be at variance with the Means appointed to preſerve them. And, as to the Obligation of obſerving theſe Duties, 'tis on all ſides equal: For, ſince we are bound to obey God by all the Ties of moral Duty, and ſince the Inſtitutions of Religion are of God's Appointment, whatever the Matter of the Inſtitution be, the Obligation to obey is certainly a moral Obligation: Which, duly conſidered, will ſhew, that the Text extends to all Parts of Religion, and that *on theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART I.

HEBREWS iii. 12.

Take heed, Brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief in departing from the living God.

THE Words of the Text contain an earneſt Exhortation, as is evident upon the firſt View: And the Subject of the Exhortation is Faith towards God; for Faith is the Principle deſtroyed by an *evil Heart of Unbelief.* But Faith, as ſome think, is no proper Subject for Exhortation: For, if Faith is a mere Act of the Mind judging upon Motives of Credibility, 'tis as reaſonable to exhort a Man to ſee with his Eyes, as to

judge with his Underſtanding; and the warmeſt Admonition will not enlarge the Sight, which will ſtill depend upon the Goodneſs of the Eye, and the Diſtance and Poſition of the Object. In Faith the Caſe is much the ſame: If the Affections are thoroughly raiſed, and made eager to embrace the Faith, they may chance indeed to ſtep in between the Premiſes and Concluſion, and make Men profeſs to believe, without knowing or conſidering the Reaſons of Belief; which is to deſtroy the Foundation of Faith: Or, if they keep their due Diſtance, and leave the Cauſe to be decided by Reaſon and Underſtanding, their Influence will be nothing, and they might as well have been left out of the Caſe; ſince Faith will follow the Judgment the Mind makes upon the Motives of Credibility.

But then, if this be the true Notion of Faith, That it is merely an Act of the Mind aſſenting to a Truth upon Motives of Credibility, how comes it that in every Page we find the Praiſes of it in the Goſpel? What is there in this to deſerve the Bleſſings promiſed to the Faithful? Or, whence is it that the whole of our Salvation is put upon this Foot? *Abraham*, we are told, *was juſtified by Faith, and by Faith inherited the Promiſes*:

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By Faith we become the Sons of Abraham, and Heirs together with him of the Hope which is through Chriſt Jeſus: By Faith we have admittance to God, and are intitled through the Spirit of Adoption to cry Abba, Father: By Faith we are delivered from the Bondage of Corruption into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God: By Faith we wait for the Adoption, to wit, the Redemption of our Body. But how come all theſe Prerogatives to belong to Faith, if Faith be nothing elſe but believing Things in themſelves credible? Why are we not ſaid to be juſtified by Sight, as well as by Faith? for is there not the ſame Virtue in ſeeing Things viſible, as in believing Things credible? is not the Underſtanding as faulty when it rejects Things credible, as the Eye when it does not perceive Things viſible? Tell me then, what is Faith, that it ſhould raiſe Men above the Level of Mortality, and make them become like the Angels of Heaven?

But farther; If Faith be only an Act of the Underſtanding formed upon due Reaſons and Motives, how comes it to be deſcribed in Scripture as having its Seat in the Heart? The Apoſtle in the Text cautions againſt *an evil Heart of Unbelief:* And the ſame Notion prevails throughout the Books of Scripture,

and

and is as early as our Saviour's firſt Preaching. In explaining the Parable of the Sower to his Diſciples, *Luke* viii. he tells them, *Thoſe by the Way-ſide are they that hear: Then cometh the Devil, and taketh away the Word out of their Hearts, leſt they ſhould believe, and be ſaved*, Ver. 12. So again, *That on the good Ground are they which in an honeſt and good Heart hear the Word, and bring forth Fruit with Patience*, Ver. 15. The firſt ſort are thoſe who had an *evil Heart of Unbelief*: The ſecond are thoſe who, as the ſame Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* expreſſes it, Chap. 10, had a *true Heart in full Aſſurance of Faith*. In the Acts of the Apoſtles, *Philip* tells the Eunuch, That, if he *believed with all his Heart*, he might be baptized, Chap. viii. 37: And *Barnabas* exhorts the *Antiochians*, *That with Purpoſe of Heart they would cleave unto the Lord*; which is only a Periphraſis for Faith, Chap. xi. 23. The Apoſtle to the *Romans* has *ex profeſſo* determined this Matter: *If thou ſhalt confeſs*, ſays he, *with thy Mouth the Lord Jeſus, and ſhalt believe in thine Heart that God hath raiſed him from the Dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved*, Chap. x. 9. In the following Verſe he gives this general Reaſon for his Aſſertion: *For with the Heart Man believeth unto*

unto Righteouſneſs, and with the Mouth Confeſſion is made unto Salvation.

Since then the Scripture, read to you for the Text, contains an Exhortation to Faith, which ſuppoſes a Man's Faith to be influenced by his Affections and Inclinations; which is not always true, if we conſider Faith merely as the Aſſent of the Mind to a credible Propoſition: Since there are alſo ſuch Things aſcribed to Faith in Scripture, ſuch Promiſes made to it, as cannot belong to it in this Acceptation: Since Faith, thus conſidered, is a bare Act of the Mind; but the Faith of the Goſpel is deſcribed as having its Seat and Operations in the Heart of Man: It is neceſſary, for the right Underſtanding of the Text, to inquire,

Firſt, What is the true Notion of Faith.

From whence, in the ſecond Place, it will appear, That it is a proper Exhortation, *Take heed, leſt there be in us an evil Heart of Unbelief.*

The firſt Thing to be inquired after is the true Notion of Faith.

Every Step by which we advance to the laſt Degree of Perfection in Faith, is an Act of Faith, though of a different kind, and not entitled either to the Praiſes or Rewards of the Goſpel. And hence has

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aroſe great Part of the Confuſion which has obſcured and darkened this Queſtion concerning Faith: For, when Men, not diſtinguiſhing between the intermediate Acts of Faith, and that Faith which is the ultimate End and Perfection of the Goſpel, aſcribe that to one, which only and properly belongs to the other, no wonder if they are found inconſiſtent with themſelves, and Deſtroyers of Reaſon and Religion, whilſt they ſeem to themſelves to labour for the Promotion of the Doctrine of Righteouſneſs.

To render what I mean plain and intelligible, I deſire you to conſider the Degrees and Steps of Faith by which Men arrive at Goſpel Righteouſneſs. It is one Degree of Faith to believe the Goſpels to be true and faithful Accounts; and it is a Degree that leads to great Perfection: He that wants this Faith is at a ſtand, and can never proceed farther. But this is not the Faith we ſeek after. It is a farther Degree of Faith to believe the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles to be true and real Miracles, and wrought by the Power and Spirit of God. But neither is this Faith complete: For the Miracles were wrought, not for their own ſakes, but for the ſake of ſomething elſe: And therefore to believe the Miracles, without

out believing what the Miracles were intended to prove, is not Chriſtian Faith. Farther ſtill; It is another and a more advanced Degree of Faith to believe that the Spirit of God was given to the Apoſtles in a large meaſure, and to Chriſt, the Author of the Salvation, without meaſure. But neither is this the Faith which Chriſt came to propagate: For, ſhould I aſk you, Why are we taught, and why are we to believe, that God gave the Spirit to his Son without meaſure, and to the Diſciples in a very wonderful manner and degree? would you not eaſily anſwer, that theſe heavenly Endowments were both given and declared to make them fit Teachers, and us ready Diſciples, of the Doctrines of God? It is evident then, that theſe Gifts were ſubſervient to a farther End, and that Chriſtian Faith does not terminate here. But, if, notwithſtanding this, you will apply all that you read of Faith in holy Scripture to theſe or any of theſe kinds of Faith, and then imagine that Faith is a very ſtrange Principle of Religion, and of foreign Growth, repugnant to the Senſe and Reaſon of Mankind, and diſclaimed by the Light of Nature; which are the uſual Compliments beſtowed on it in the World; you may thank your-

ſelf

ſelf for the Deluſion: The Doctrine of the Goſpel of Chriſt is clear of the Reproach.

Faith, which is the Principle of the Goſpel, reſpects the Promiſes and Declarations of God, and includes a ſure Truſt and Reliance on Him for the Performance. Beyond this there is no farther Act of Faith. We are not taught to believe this in order to our believing ſomething elſe: But here Faith has its full Completion, and leads immediately to the Practice of Virtue and Holineſs, the Conditions in which all the Promiſes of God are founded. For this End was the Son of God revealed, to make known the Will of his Father, to declare his Mercy and Pardon, and to confirm the Promiſes of eternal Life to Mankind: He that believes and accepts this Deliverance from the Bondage of Sin, and through Patience and Perſeverance in Well-doing waits for the bleſſed Hope of Immortality; who paſſes through this World as a Stranger and Pilgrim, looking for another Country, and a City whoſe Builder is God; this is He whoſe Faith ſhall receive the Promiſe, whoſe Confidence ſhall have great Recompence of Reward.

If theſe are hard Sayings, what Defence ſhall we make for Natural Religion, which requires

requires almoſt the ſame Faith, but without giving the ſame Evidence? Is it not the Profeſſion of every Religion to believe God to be a Rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him? Could you have any Natural Religion without this Principle? This the Goſpel requires of you: And, if Jeſus Chriſt has given you more Evidence for this Faith than ever Nature could afford her Children, forgive him this Injury. Is it become leſs credible that God will reward the Righteous, becauſe he has ſent his Son into the World to declare his full Purpoſe ſo to do? Is it harder to truſt him now, ſince he has appeared to us in Signs and in Wonders and in mighty Works, than it was before, when we ſaw him only by the glimmering Light of Nature? Are the expreſs Promiſes of God, confirmed to us in Chriſt Jeſus, of leſs weight than the general Suggeſtions of Nature? If theſe expreſs Promiſes, theſe clear Evidences of the Purpoſe of God, are not the Things complained of in the Goſpel, what are they? Faith has ever been the Principle of Religion, and muſt ever continue ſo to be: For, when all other Gifts ſhall ceaſe, Faith, Hope, and Charity will be the only Goſpel Graces which Time ſhall not deſtroy.

Religion is a Struggle between Senſe and Faith. The Temptations to Sin are the Pleaſures of this Life: The Incitements to Virtue are the Pleaſures of the next. Theſe are only ſeen by Faith: Thoſe are the Objects of every Senſe. On the ſide of Virtue all the Motives, all the Objects of Faith engage: On the ſide of Vice, ſtand the formidable Powers of Senſe, Paſſion, and Affection. Where the Heart is eſtabliſhed in the Fulneſs of Faith, the heavenly Hoſt prevails, and Virtue triumphs over all the Works of Darkneſs: But, where Senſe governs, Sin enters, and is ſerved by every evil Paſſion of the Heart. If this be the Caſe; if Religion has nothing to oppoſe to the preſent Allurements of the World, but the Hopes and Glories of Futurity, which are ſeen only by Faith; 'tis no more abſurd to ſay Men are ſaved by Faith, than it is to ſay they are ruined by Senſe and Paſſion; which we all know has ſo much of Truth in it, that it can have nothing of Abſurdity.

To this Account of Faith the Definition which the Apoſtle has given of it (in the eleventh Chapter to the *Hebrews*) exactly agrees: *Now Faith is the Subſtance of Things hoped for, the Evidence of Things not ſeen.*

Things

Things hoped for are the Things of Futurity, Things which are not ſeen, as we learn from St. *Paul*, *Romans* viii. 24: *We are ſaved by Hope: But Hope that is ſeen is not Hope: For what a Man ſeeth why doth he yet hope for?* Now without Faith there can be no Hope: For, if we do not believe Things future, we cannot poſſibly hope for them. Hope therefore is indebted to Faith for all its Objects: For theſe Things with reſpect to Hope would be mere Non-entities, were it not for Faith. Conſidered therefore as Things hoped for, they owe their Subſtance and their Being to Faith. *Faith* then *is the Subſtance of Things hoped for, the Evidence of Things not ſeen. The Things not ſeen* are thoſe good Things which God has prepared for them who love him, the Rewards of Virtue and Holineſs, which Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither hath the Heart of Man conceived. And that theſe Things are chiefly meant by the Apoſtle, is evident from the great Number of Inſtances ſubjoined in this Chapter, in which the Thing not ſeen is generally the Promiſe of God, that is, the Thing promiſed by God. Now, the Promiſes of God being neither Objects of Senſe nor Science, but ſuch Things as are made known to us by

his Declaration, the Evidence upon which they are received is the Evidence of Faith. The Reaſon why we believe there are ſuch Rewards, is, becauſe we believe the Word of God: The Reaſon why we hope to receive them, is, becauſe we judge *Him faithful who has promiſed.*

Since then all the Bleſſings of Holineſs, all the Hopes of Religion, are founded in Faith, is it not very natural to ſay, that the Man who follows after Holineſs and Piety, induced by the glorious Proſpects of Futurity, is ſaved by Faith? that he who ſacrifices the World and its Enjoyments to the Hopes of Eternity, depending entirely upon the Truth of God, that he will perform the Word which is gone out of his Mouth, is ſaved by his Faith, without which he could have had no Hopes, no Expectations, to place againſt the preſent Enjoyments of the World? Do but conſider the Poſture of Mind a Man is in, when he deliberates upon the Good and Evil of his own Actions, and in determining his Choice whether to follow the Pleaſures of Sin, or to endure the Hardſhips and Fatigues of Virtue: What are his Motives, what are his Deliberations? Is not the whole Conteſt between Things preſent and Things

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to come, the Realities of this Life, and the Uncertainty of the other? Moſt certainly this is the whole Debate: For, put the Things of this Life and the next upon the ſame Foot of Certainty and Reality, and there is no Man Fool enough to deliberate in his Choice. Were the Glories of Heaven the Objects of Senſe; could we with the Eyes of Fleſh look up to the Throne of God, the heavenly *Jeruſalem*, and diſcern *the innumerable Company of Angels, the general Aſſembly and Church of the Firſt-born, which are written in Heaven, and God the Judge of all, and the Spirits of juſt Men made perfect, and Jeſus the Mediator of the new Covenant, and the Blood of Sprinkling, that ſpeaketh better Things than that of Abel:* Could we have this View, a Man would no more part with his Inheritance above for the ſhort Enjoyments of Sin, than he would ſell the Reverſion of an earthly Crown for one Morſel of Meat. The Cauſe of Sin therefore is never argued upon the Compariſon between the Glories of Heaven, and the Pleaſures of Life. No wicked Man was ever ſo weak as to ſay, 'Tis better for me to eat, drink, and be merry this Day and the next, than to reign in eternal Glory and Immortality. But thus he reaſons, The

Things about me are preſent and real: I ſee, I feel the World; and every Senſe directs me to the Enjoyment of it: But for Heaven, where is it? Diſtant it is, I am ſure, and out of ſight; and perhaps is only a Deluſion of ſickly Imagination. When this Reaſoning prevails, as too often it does, tell me, I beſeech you, is it not a Victory gained by Senſe over the Power of Faith? Had Faith been ſtrong enough to have placed in view the Subſtance of Things hoped for, to have made evident the Things not ſeen, could the World ſo eaſily have prevailed? I truſt, it could not; for the Things of Faith as much excel the Things of Senſe, as the Heavens are higher than the Earth. But, where Faith is not ſtrong enough to make a Competition between the Things of Futurity and the preſent Pleaſures, the World muſt triumph, and the Sinner will be loſt for want of Faith. On the other ſide, what is it that makes Men willingly endure Afflictions and Perſecutions? Do you think the righteous Man ſo very ſilly as not to know that Pleaſure is better than Pain, Eaſe and Tranquillity to be prefered to Vexation and Torment? Can you imagine that he chuſes Oppreſſion for Oppreſſion's ſake? No certainly: But his Faith,

his

his Truſt and Confidence in God, make him eſteem the Promiſes of God as if they were preſent before his Eyes; to the Hopes of them he ſacrifices the World; and, after the Example of his great Maſter, the Author and Finiſher of our Faith, *for the Joy that is ſet before him, he endures the Croſs, deſpiſing the Shame.* Thus *Moſes* by Faith, when he was come to Years, refuſed to be called the Son of *Pharaoh*'s Daughter, *chuſing rather to ſuffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleaſures of Sin for a Seaſon.* Mark the Reaſon which follows, and the Power of his Faith: *Eſteeming the Reproach of Chriſt greater Riches than the Treaſures in Egypt: For he had reſpect unto the Recompence of Reward. By Faith alſo he forſook Egypt, not fearing the Wrath of the King.* But what Confidence was this? What Forces, what Allies, had he to ſupport him againſt the united Strength of *Egypt?* Thus Senſe indeed would reaſon. But *through Faith he endured, as ſeeing Him who is inviſible:* Though he had no viſible Protector, yet through Faith he ſaw the Hand of God ſtretched out for his Deliverance. This was his Confidence, this his Support.

Towards the Cloſe of this eleventh Chapter the Apoſtle ſings the Triumphs of Faith

under all the Cruelties of Men: *Others*, ſays he, *were tortured; and others had Trial of cruel Mockings and Scourgings, yea moreover of Bonds and Impriſonments: They were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, were tempted, were ſlain with the Sword; they wandered about in Sheep-ſkins and Goat-ſkins, being deſtitute, afflicted, tormented.* All theſe perſiſted in Faith, *not accepting Deliverance, that they might obtain a better Reſurrection.* The Reſurrection was a State they had never ſeen; it was what they could only hope for: But the Promiſe of God was to them more than the Evidence of Sight; and to their Truſt and Confidence in him they willingly gave up all that their Eyes beheld, and ſubmitted to the Evils, which Senſe is ever warning us againſt.

From this Account it will be eaſy to underſtand what the Scripture means, when it tells us *that Faith overcometh the World:* For Religion is a Conteſt between the World and Faith, between Things preſent and Things to come. Faith puts us under the Conduct of future Hopes and Fears, exempts us from the Power and Influence of Things preſent; which preſent Things are the World: And therefore 'tis properly ſaid of Faith, *that it overcometh the World.*

To

To this Notion of Faith agrees likewiſe what St. *Paul* has ſaid concerning it in his Compariſon between Faith, Hope, and Charity, and other ſpiritual Gifts, ſuch as Speaking with Tongues, Propheſying, and Healing of Diſtempers. Theſe ſhall ceaſe: *But now remaineth*, ſays the Apoſtle, *Faith, Hope, and Charity; and the greateſt of theſe is Charity:* For Charity and univerſal Benevolence is the very Grace and Ornament of Heaven, the Employment and the Pleaſure of bleſſed Spirits. Nor can Faith and Hope ever be parted from true Religion: For there is no Being ſo great as not to depend on Faith in God, and Truſt in his Power and Wiſdom, or to be above hoping any thing from his Goodneſs and Benevolence. And therefore the Apoſtle ſays expreſly of Faith and Hope, that they ſhall remain, with Charity, the greateſt of the three. Other Gifts are beſtowed for the Service of the Church, ſuch as Tongues, Miracles, and the like; and they may well ceaſe, when the Occaſion which required them ceaſes: But Faith, Hope, and Charity are not occaſional Gifts, but are eſſential to Religion, and muſt continue as long as Religion itſelf.

From this Account we may perceive likewiſe how the Heart comes to have ſuch an

Intereſt and Influence in the Faith of a Chriſtian. 'Tis the Love of the World that is the Enemy of Faith: And is not the Heart of Man the very Magazine from which the World ſupplies itſelf with Arms? Where dwell Self-love, Luſt, Envy, and Covetouſneſs, are not theſe the evil Treaſure of an evil Heart? and are not theſe the fierceſt Combatants againſt Faith? and may not an Heart thus ſtocked be properly ſtyled *an Heart of Unbelief.*

In other Matters of Faith, which ſeem to be of a more abſtracted Nature, and to depend entirely on the Reaſon and Judgment of Men, the Heart often interpoſes with too much Succeſs: For theſe are ſo nearly related to the Faith which ſubdues the World and the Heart, that the Heart, watchful for itſelf and the World, diſturbs the Mind, and raiſes ſuch Clouds of Paſſion, as intercept the Light of Truth. To believe Chriſt to be the Son of God, to have dwelt for ever in the Glory of his Father, from thence to have come to our Redemption, and to have publiſhed the Faith in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works, are ſuch killing Blows to the Love of the World, that the Heart cannot be unconcerned whilſt

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theſe Things are debating: And, though they can only be tried at the Bar of Reaſon, yet the Heart will be Counſel on one Side or other: And even in theſe Caſes there is Reaſon to remember the Apoſtolical Admonition, *Take heed, leſt there be in you an evil Heart of Unbelief,*

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART II.

I Proceed to conſider the Character given in the Text of an unbelieving Heart; namely, That it makes us *depart from the living God.* What may be proper to be ſaid on this Subject may be reduced, I think, under theſe three Heads:

Firſt, To ſhew, that it is for want of Faith, conſidered as a Principle of Religion, that Men *depart from the living God.*

Secondly, That Faith cannot be a Principle of Religion, until it has its Effects and Operations in the Heart.

Thirdly, That the Motions and Operations of the Heart are in great meaſure under our own Power and Government.

And

And from hence it will evidently appear, how much it is the Buſineſs and Concern of a religious Life to be watchful over the Heart, to guard againſt all ſuch Affections as will deſtroy the Influence of Faith, and render the Heart uncapable of receiving the Impreſſions of the Spirit of God.

Firſt then, We are to ſhew that it is for want of Faith, conſidered as a Principle of Religion, that Men *depart from the living God.* What is meant by *departing from God,* will appear by comparing this with other equivalent Expreſſions made uſe of in this Chapter. In the eighth Verſe the Apoſtle introduces the Holy Ghoſt ſpeaking in the Language of the Pſalmiſt, and thus forewarning the People, *Harden not your Hearts.* In the tenth Verſe God complains of the rebellious *Iſraelites* in the Wilderneſs, ſaying, *They do alway err in their Hearts, and they have not known my Ways.* In the Verſe immediately after the Text the Apoſtle thus explains his Meaning: *But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, leſt any of you be hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.* So then, to be hardened in Heart, to err in Heart, not to know or walk in the Ways of God, to be hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, are one and the ſame

Thing

Thing as departing from the living God: And the Meaning of theſe figurative Expreſſions is clearly explained at the ſeventeenth Verſe: *But with whom was he grieved forty Years? was it not with them that had ſinned?* As Sinners are ſaid *to depart from God*, ſo thoſe who forſake Sin, and are converted, are ſaid, in the Language of Scripture, to *turn to God*. Of the holy Baptiſt, who came preaching Repentance from dead Works, it was foretold, That he *ſhould turn many to the Lord their God*, Luke i. 16. And the Apoſtles *Paul* and *Barnabas* thus deſcribe the Purpoſe and End of their Miſſion: *We preach unto you, that ye ſhould turn from theſe Vanities unto the living God*, Acts xiv. 15.

The Propriety of theſe Expreſſions will appear, if we conſider God, under the Repreſentation made of him by our Saviour in the Parable of the Prodigal, as the Father of the Family; and Sinners as prodigal Sons, who, weary of their Father's Government, forſake his Houſe, and, reduced by Luxury and Riot, enter into the Service of ſtrange Maſters, till the Senſe of Want and their own Miſery brings them back to beg Admittance again into their Father's Houſe. Thus the Nations of old forſook the Service of

of God, their heavenly Father, and fell under the hard Bondage of ſtrange Deities: They were Apoſtates from Him who had a Right to their Obedience, and Slaves to thoſe who had no Dominion over them: When they received the Goſpel, it was not putting themſelves under a new Maſter, but returning to their old one, and yielding that Obedience which was always due, though never paid before. Since therefore by Faith in the Goſpel of Chriſt we become the Servants of the living God, and are once more entered into his Family, it is eaſy to apprehend the Reaſon why the Apoſtle in the Text charges an unbelieving Heart with Apoſtaſy from the living God: For, if Chriſtian Faith be the Principle by which we are united to the living God, whatever deſtroys this Principle does at the ſame time diſſolve the Union; and we cannot make Shipwreck of the Faith without departing from God. An unbelieving Heart therefore, that is, an Heart void of Chriſtian Faith, is guilty of Apoſtaſy.

But you may aſk perhaps, May not the Heart poſſibly depart from God through the Solicitations of Vice and Pleaſure, and Faith at the ſame time ſtand ſound and uncorrupted? And there is this Ground for

putting

putting the Queſtion, That we ſee many Men who are buried in Wickedneſs, whoſe Life is but one continued Scene of guilty Enjoyments, who ſacrifice their Honour, their Faith, and their Religion, to Luſt, Covetouſneſs, or Intemperance; who yet profeſs to believe all the Doctrines of the Goſpel, and do really believe them, for ought that any Man knows to the contrary. But, when I reflect upon the expreſs Declarations of the Goſpel, *That every one who believeth ſhall be ſaved, That all the Workers of Iniquity ſhall be deſtroyed*; if theſe Characters can ſubſiſt together, if the ſame Perſon at the ſame Time may be both a Believer and a Worker of Iniquity, there is a greater Contradiction in the Goſpel than any that has yet been pretended by its keeneſt Enemies.

How muſt we then account for this Difficulty? The true Anſwer, I think, is, That the Difficulty ariſes from confounding and blending together Ideas which are perfectly diſtinct, from not ſeparating between Faith conſidered as a Principle of Knowledge, and as a Principle of Religion. In common Life we know many Things upon the Evidence of Faith: Such are the Things which we receive upon the Authority of hiſtorical Evidence, or upon the Report and Teſtimony of

credible Witneſſes: And ſuch Influence has this Principle of Knowledge in the World, that there is hardly any thing of Conſequence that is not determined by it. There is not a Trial that affects either our Lives or our Fortunes, the Iſſue of which does not depend upon this Principle of Knowledge, the Judge and the Jury not being ſuppoſed to have the Evidence of their own Senſes in the Facts which come under their Determination. I mention this to put it out of diſpute that Faith is one of the Sources or Principles of our Knowledge. Now mere ſpeculative Knowledge has nothing in it of moral Good or Evil: A Man is not better or worſe for what he knows, till he comes to act, or to be influenced to Action by his Knowledge. Bare Knowledge therefore is nothing akin to Religion; for Religion is not one of thoſe very indifferent Things, which has neither Good nor Evil in it. The ſpeculative Knowledge therefore of Truths depending upon divine Teſtimony is mere Knowledge, and not Religion: For there is no Difference in the ſimple Act of the Mind, whether the Aſſent be grounded upon divine Teſtimony, or human Teſtimony; unleſs you think that every thing muſt be Religion, that depends upon our Belief of the Being of God: Which

is

is not true; becauſe there may be this Belief, where there can be no Religion; for St. *James* has told us, *that the Devils believe and tremble*. Now the wicked Man's Faith can be nothing more but this ſpeculative Knowledge or Belief of divine Truths: For 'tis evident it has no Effect, no Influence; and is therefore ſo far from being the ſaving Faith of the Goſpel, that 'tis not in any degree religious. Our Lord in the Goſpel has given us a ſhort Deſcription of Religion, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart and with all thy Soul, and thy Neighbour as thyſelf*. Now, in order to love God, we muſt know Him, and his Attributes; in order to love our Neighbour, we muſt know our Neighbour, and his Condition: And there is juſt as much Religion in knowing God without loving and obeying him, as there is in knowing our Neighbour without loving or regarding him. The Man who believes God, and pretends to a right Faith in divine Matters, and lives in the Neglect of God, in Contempt of his Commands, and ſins in defiance of Knowledge, has juſt as much Faith, as the Prieſt and the Levite had Charity, who ſaw their Neighbour ſtripped, and wounded, and lying half-dead in the Road, and *looked on him, and paſſed by on the other Side*. The

Knowledge of God is but like other natural Knowledge, as long as it has its Reſidence in the Head only: To become a Principle of Religion, it muſt deſcend into the Heart, and teach us to *love the Lord with all our Minds, with all our Souls, and with all our Strength*: And, if this be true of the Knowledge of God, which is the firſt and greateſt of all divine Truths, it muſt be true in all other Inſtances whatever. The Faith then of the Goſpel, and which the wicked Man is an utter Stranger to, is that Faith which makes us *cleave ſtedfaſtly to the Lord with full Purpoſe of Heart*. And this will farther appear under the ſecond Head, which was, to ſhew,

Secondly, That Faith cannot be a Principle of Religion, till it has its Effect and Operation in the Heart. If we conſider Religion under the Notion of Action, this Propoſition has, I think, nothing ſtrange or ſurprizing in it: For 'tis not only true of Faith, but of every Principle of Knowledge and Action: 'Tis altogether as true of Senſe, as 'tis of Faith. As Faith makes us cleave to God, ſo Senſe makes us cleave to the World: But, till Senſe has Poſſeſſion of the Heart, it has no Power or Efficacy, and is of no Uſe and Service to the World. We learn from

from Senſe the Exiſtence and Reality of Things temporal: But this Aſſent of the Mind to the Evidence of Senſe never made any Man wicked or worldly-minded: For, if it did, no Man would ever be righteous; for the beſt Man that ever was in the World had his Knowledge of external Things from the Evidence of Senſe. But, when Senſe ſtirs the Deſires and Affections of the Heart, then it becomes a Principle of Action, and a fierce Combatant for the World againſt the Powers of Faith. If we remember what was ſaid of the wicked Man with regard to his Faith and Perſwaſion about divine Truths, we ſhall find how exactly the righteous Man is in the ſame Caſe in reſpect to ſenſible Things: As the wicked Man has the Knowledge of Faith, but nothing religious, ſo has the righteous Man all the Knowledge of Senſe, but nothing ſenſual: The Difference therefore between a ſenſual Man and a righteous Man does not conſiſt in this, that one knows moſt of ſenſible Things, and the other moſt of divine Things, for this in both Caſes may be, and often is falſe; but it lies in this, that one purſues the Objects of Senſe, the other the Objects of Faith.

To trace this Parallel between Senſe and Faith, a little farther may give us perhaps a true Conception of the Nature of Faith, the Thing we ſeek after. Let us conſider then how the Caſe ſtands between Senſe and Faith, Things preſent and Things to come, between Senſuality and Religion. The Deſires which God has planted in our Nature are the Springs of Action; and we always propoſe the obtaining ſome End, which is the Object of ſome Deſire, in every thing we do. It is evident then, that, where there is nothing to move and incite our Deſires, we muſt be unconcerned and inactive. All Objects of our Deſires are firſt Objects of the Underſtanding, according to the known Saying of the Poet, *ignoti nulla Cupido.* But there are many Objects of the Mind which are never Objects of the Paſſions; for the Mind muſt not only apprehend the Thing, but likewiſe apprehend it as a real Thing, and as having the relation of Good or Evil to a Man, before it can have any Effect upon our Inclinations. From this Account it is plain, that, to make a Man perform the Actions either of Religion or of common Life, his Deſires, which are the Springs of Action, muſt be moved; And, ſince nothing can move the Deſires, which

which is not firſt the Object of the Underſtanding, he muſt have the Knowledge of the Things of this Life, and of Religion; and conſider them under the Notion of Good or Evil with reſpect to himſelf.

Now the Enjoyment of the Things of this World is the Buſineſs and Employment of the ſenſual Man: The good Things of Futurity and another Life are the religious Man's Care and Concern. As the Objects are of different Kinds, ſo the Means of obtaining the Knowledge of the Objects are likewiſe different. Things preſent are repreſented to our Minds by every Senſe; the Things of Futurity by no Senſe: And in this ſingle Point lies the great Advantage which the World has over Religion. The World has as many Ways of making itſelf familiar to us, as we have Senſes: Religion has only the dark Glimpſe of Futurity, ſuch as Reaſon, in its preſent feeble and low Condition, can diſcover. The only Thing then that is wanting to ſet Religion upon as good a Foot as the World, and to make it able to bear up againſt the Impreſſions of Senſe, is a certain Principle of Knowledge with reſpect to the Objects of Religion: For, could we as evidently poſſeſs ourſelves of the Reality of the Things of another

Life, as we are poſſeſſed of the Reality of the Things of this, there would be no more Competition between Senſe and Religion, than there is Compariſon between the Things of this Life and of Eternity. To ſupply this Darkneſs of our Knowledge in Religion is the very End and Deſign of Revelation: For, could we as plainly diſcern the good Things of Futurity, as we ſee and feel the good Things preſent, there would be no more Want of Revelation to make us acquainted with the other World, than there is to make us acquainted with this. Now, as Senſe is evidently to be diſtinguiſhed into a Principle of Knowledge, and a Principle of Action, ſo is Faith likewiſe. We never eſteem a Man to be ſenſual or worldly-minded, merely becauſe Senſe has furniſhed him with a comprehenſive Knowledge of ſenſible Objects: So neither is a Man to be accounted a religious Man, becauſe of that Faith which flows from Revelation, conſidered merely as a Principle of religious Knowledge. This Diſtinction between Senſe as a Principle of Knowledge, and a Principle of Action, may be ſeen in any or in every Inſtance. An honeſt Man knows the Uſe and Value of Riches, as well as a Thief. 'Tis not therefore the Knowledge of the Object, but the immoderate Deſire of it, that makes the Difference;

ference: And one Man may be juſtly hanged for ſtealing five Pounds, and another be very innocent who had ſeen and examined the Value of the Mines of *Peru*. In Religion the Caſe is juſt the ſame; Faith, as long as it continues to be a mere Object of the Mind, is no Principle of Religion; and one is no more a religious Man for knowing the Articles of Religion, than he is a ſenſual Man for walking with his Eyes open and ſeeing the World. An unbelieving Heart is the ſame Thing in Faith, that an Antipathy is in Senſe, and ſuppoſes us rather to hate than not to know our Duty. Many Men are ruined by the Love of Wine and ſtrong Liquors. Stop but the Paſſage to the Heart, and theſe Objects loſe all their Force and Power, and a Man ſees the Wine ſparkle with leſs Concern than he ſees the Moon ſhine. And this is the Caſe of all thoſe who have a natural Averſion to ſtrong Drinks, which is no uncommon Caſe. This Averſion affects Senſe only as 'tis a Principle of Action, and leaves it free as 'tis the Principle of Knowledge: And in like Manner, the unbelieving Heart deſtroys that Faith which is the Life and Principle of Religion, though it may not, perhaps, diſturb the Objects of Faith which have their Reſidence in another Place.

Upon

Upon the whole then; ſince Religion is not a mere Science and Speculation, but is to be the Work and Employment of our Lives, and to exert itſelf in the Love of God and our Neighbour, as our bleſſed Saviour has taught us; ſince the Knowledge of any thing, or the Belief of any thing, conſidered merely as Acts of the Mind, are no Principles of Action; but every Action propoſes to itſelf ſome End, which is the Object of ſome Deſire; it evidently follows, that Faith cannot be a Principle of Religion, till it becomes the Object of our Deſires, that is, till it has its Effects and Operations in the Heart. This Notion of Faith is not only probable, but neceſſary, upon the View of our own Nature, and the Origin of all our Actions, which ariſe in the ſame Manner, whatever the Principle of Action be. Even Senſe works in the ſame Manner, and, powerful as it is, has no Effect, till it has made its way to the Heart, the Seat of all our Paſſions and Affections. There, and there only, it prevails as a Principle of Action. Senſe produces no Senſuality, till it warms the Affections with the Pleaſures of the World; and Faith produces no Religion, till it raiſes the Heart to love and to embrace its Maker.

The great Advantage the World has over Religion lies in the Certainty and Reality of its

its Objects, which flow in upon us at every Senſe. To ſupply this Defect on the Part of Religion, Revelation was given to aſſure us of the Certainty and Reality of Things future; without which Aſſurance they could have no Effect or Influence on our Affections. The Objects of Faith then ſupport Religion in the ſame Manner as the Objects of Senſe promote and encourage the Love of the World: And, as there could be no ſenſual Love of the World, if there were no Objects of Senſe; ſo neither could there be any Religion, where there are no Articles of Faith: For as, in general, there can be no Deſire, where there is no Knowledge; ſo, in particular, there can be no Principle of Faith, where there are no Objects of Faith.

All the Articles of the Goſpel tend to one of theſe Ends, either to aſſure us of the Certainty of the Revelation and Redemption by Chriſt Jeſus, or to ſet before us the very Subſtance and Image of the Things hoped for. For this laſt Purpoſe our Lord roſe viſibly from the Grave, to give us the very Evidence of Senſe for that Part of our Faith, which ſeemed to be moſt contradictory to the Experience of Senſe. For the firſt Purpoſe, to aſſure us of the Certainty of the Revelation and Redemption by Chriſt Jeſus, *our Lord was declared to*

be

be the only-begotten Son of God, the Brightneſs of his Father's Glory, and the expreſs Image of his Perſon; by whom the Worlds were made, and who upholdeth all Things by the Word of his Power; that we, knowing in whom we have truſted, might hold faſt the Confidence *and Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering: (For He is faithful that promiſed.)* When Chriſt was declared by the Voice out of the Cloud to be the Son of God, the ſame Voice gave the Reaſon of the Declaration; *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him,* Luke xvii. 5. To reject therefore theſe Articles of the Goſpel, is to reject the Revelation and the Redemption of Chriſt, and to ſet out purely on the Foot of Natural Religion. How reaſonably you may do this, and how well it becomes your Condition, the Time will not permit me now to ſhew.

Theſe Objects of Faith are our Motives and Incitements to Holineſs and Righteouſneſs; and, if we ſuffer them to have their due Influence on our Hearts, they produce that Faith, which is the Life and Spirit of a Chriſtian, which unites him to God, and will entitle him to Glory at the great Day. How far 'tis in our Power to promote or obſtruct this Influence, will appear under the laſt Head, which was, to ſhew,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That the Motions and Operations of the Heart are in great Meaſure under our own Power and Government.

I ſhall not ſpend much of your Time in a plain Caſe, and in which every Man's own Experience is his beſt Inſtructor.—We find daily, that we can check our Paſſions and Inclinations, to ſerve the Purpoſes of this Life; and, if we would do as much for that which is to come, we ſhould anſwer all that the Apoſtle in the Text requires of us, when he exhorts us to *take heed of an evil Heart of Unbelief.* Were it not in our Power to ſuſpend the Influence of our Paſſions, Man would have no more Freedom or Liberty than a Stone, and would, conſequently, be utterly incapable of Religion. 'Tis not in our Power to feel, or not to feel, the Impreſſions of Senſe: Our Eyes, our Ears, and every Senſe, preſent before us the Objects of the World, whether we will, or no; and, if theſe Objects can as uncontroulably take Poſſeſſion of our Hearts, as they do of our Minds and Imaginations, all Men muſt as neceſſarily follow the Dictates of Senſe, as they admit the Objects of Senſe: Which would deſtroy, not only the Power of Faith, but all moral Virtue, all Diſtinction of Good and Evil. But this is not the Caſe: For, tho' we cannot ſee Things as

we

we will, yet 'tis in our Power to purſue and court them as we pleaſe: We can ſupple our Inclinations, and make them yield to our Will; as is evident in the many Inſtances where Men ſacrifice their preſent Enjoyments to the diſtant Proſpects of Honour or Preferment: For the future Things of this Life are no more the Objects of Senſe, than the Things of another Life; and 'tis not Senſe, but Judgment, that refuſes the preſent Good for a diſtant Advantage: And 'tis but an Inſtance of the ſame Reaſon and Judgment to reſtrain the ſenſual Appetites, and to make room for the Hopes of Immortality to enter in and poſſeſs the Heart; and this is truly the Work of Religion. God has placed before us Life and Death, Things preſent, and Things to come. If Things temporal have this Advantage, that *they are ſeen*, yet the Things which are not ſeen have this Prerogative to balance that Advantage, that *they are eternal.* The Truth of theſe Things is founded both on Reaſon and on the Teſtimony of God. If we receive his Teſtimony, 'tis well: But, if we intereſt our Hearts in the Cauſe, and act as Men reſolved to ſecure to themſelves theſe bleſſed Hopes, then is our Faith made perfect. And, ſince this depends upon the due Regulation of our Deſires, which are ſubject to the Will

Will and Judgment of Man, 'tis plain that the true Chriſtian Faith is an internal Principle, a religious Habit and Diſpoſition of Soul, which, like other good Habits, depends upon the Care we take to preſerve the Innocence and Purity of our Hearts and Minds. And this ſufficiently ſhews the Reaſonableneſs and the Senſe of the Apoſtle's Exhortation in the Text, *Take heed, leſt there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief in departing from the living God.*

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 38. Line 23. for *obſerved*, read *abſurd*.
264. Line 25. for *have*, read *hath*.
321. Line 5. for *He*, read *They*.

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